

**POSTMORTEM SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE INTERMEDIATE
STATE AND THE FINAL DESTINY OF THE UNEVANGELISED IN
THE CONTEXT OF OPENTHEISM**

J. Gordon Grant

Presented for Ph.D Degree

University of Edinburgh

2006



I hereby certify that this thesis has been composed by myself; that the work is my own and that it has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

ABSTRACT

The thesis investigates postmortem spiritual development with particular reference to the final destiny of the unevangelised in the context of opentheism, using the concept of an intermediate state between death and the final consummation. Scripture warrant for the existence of an intermediate state is outlined and the occurrence of the idea in Patristic, medieval and Reformation theology noted. Varied interpretations of Christ's descent to the underworld are given, including the possibility of a grace-filled postmortem encounter with Christ for the unevangelised. The main tenets of opentheism are expounded, affirming the openness of God to interaction with his creatures. Emphasis is put on God's limitation of his own sovereignty to allow for libertarian freedom with humans participating in choosing their own destiny in response to God's grace. The idea of a change of direction or 'second chance' after death is preferred to final decisions regarding destiny requiring to be made in this life. Spiritual development, and even conversion, are conceived as taking place in an intermediate state, leading to a theological position of 'hopeful' rather than dogmatic universalism. Finally, the practical consequences for the life of the Church are studied, including pastoral care, theodicy as an aid to mission, and the advancement of dialogue with people of other faiths.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Grateful thanks are extended to the staff of New College, Edinburgh, and, in particular to the supervisor of this thesis, the Rev Professor David Fergusson, for his incisive direction and unfailing encouragement. The helpful assistance of the staff of New College Library has also been warmly appreciated. Finally, my thanks are due to my wife, Pamela, for her constant support and understanding.

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CHAPTER 1

SCRIPTURAL AND INTERTESTAMENTAL FOUNDATIONS OF BELIEF IN AN INTERMEDIATE STATE

(a) Introduction and Hermeneutics

The principal contention of this thesis depends upon the existence of an intermediate state between the death of individuals and the final consummation of all things, variously understood as the Last Judgment or the Second Coming of Christ. Every human being would enter this interim existence, which would provide an opportunity for further spiritual development and growth. Ways in which this concept differs from the Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory will be explored. The thesis departs from traditional theology in a number of different respects, particularly in relation to the doctrine of God. The particular type of modern theology known as opentheism provides a more congenial context for the conclusions of the thesis. The origins of opentheist thinking are identified, and its basic axioms explained. Its appropriateness for encouraging a positive outcome for the final destiny of the unevangelised derives from its advocacy of the interactive relations which it claims God has with his creatures, and the libertarian freedom in which he allows them to respond to his initiatives. The thesis departs from the traditional view that final decisions regarding an individual's ultimate destiny require to be taken in this life before death. This opens up the possibility of a 'second chance' of deciding for Christ. While holding to the finality of Christ as the sole way to salvation – an axiom shared with opentheism – the existence of an intermediate state also enables those who are unevangelised at death, for reasons of history or geography, to encounter Christ in the afterlife. The thesis is unable to affirm belief in a dogmatic universalism because of scriptural witness to a double outcome of this life leading to salvation or condemnation. Belief in 'hopeful universalism' means that the possibility of conditional immortality is retained. The thesis concludes with practical applications to the life of the Church.

The scriptural basis of the thesis is important as safeguarding the project from groundless speculation. The key thought here is the Bible's witness to the nature and character of God as revealed in the incarnation of Christ. While frequent references are made to scriptural texts, the conclusions of the thesis do not depend so much on proof-texts as on deduction from the love of God made flesh in Jesus. Its hermeneutics are not founded on a fundamentalist belief in biblical inerrancy, resulting from dictation to the writers directly by God. Instead, it follows the usual doctrine of scriptural inspiration – that, in the words of 2 Tim.3:16, the Bible is 'God-breathed' in the sense that God shapes and guides its writers' thoughts. Scripture is not free from errors, and the best principle of interpretation is to compare the meaning of passages with the life and teaching of Christ. As Jesus teaches that the Spirit 'guides us into all truth' (John 16:13), and, as further revelation is added in every new generation, it is to be hoped that despite the shortcomings and imperfections of the following pages, something of the truth may shine through.¹

(b) The Old Testament Background:

The idea of an intermediate state between death and the final judgment has its roots in the Old Testament concept of Sheol, almost always translated in the Septuagint as 'Hades'. The prevalent belief in earlier periods of Old Testament history was that everyone at death passed into Sheol.(Ps. 89:48). Sometimes the term simply denoted 'the grave,' or death in its broadest sense, but normally it described a locality, either deep under the earth, (Is.38:18; Ezek.31:14 etc.) or beneath the cosmic ocean (Job 26:5), on which the earth stood. As a subterranean dwelling, far from the light of the upper air, it was thought of as a place of darkness. At death, human beings when they descended 'to the pit' ceased to be living 'persons.' They could be described as 'shades.' Their shadowy existence was only a kind of half-life, (Job 10:4) in this place of gloom, silence and forgetfulness. It was certainly not a desirable form of existence, and it is doubtful whether its denizens were fully conscious. The various activities associated with this earthly life, such as working and planning, involving knowledge and wisdom, could no longer be practised in Sheol. (Eccles.9:10). Instead, the

¹ The hermeneutics of the thesis are based on the insights of Keith Ward in *What the Bible Really Teaches*

inhabitants of Sheol, called the 'Rephaim' or 'weaklings' existed in a state of rest or perpetual sleep, free from the miseries of this life, for – "There the wicked cease from the turmoil, and there the weary are at rest." (Job 3:17). For most ordinary men and women, it was a land of no-return. (2 Sam.12:23; Job 7:9)². Indeed, in a number of passages, it is described as a prison with bars and gates preventing escape, a place of no hope. (Job 17:13-16). Until the latest of Old Testament periods, Sheol was thought to be beyond Jahweh's jurisdiction. (Ps.30:9f.; 115:17.) Eventually, however, Sheol came to be included in Jahweh's domains, as men and women came to believe that his power and presence reached over the whole earth, and so, beyond it, into Sheol. (Ps.139:8; Amos 9:2.)

A significant change in thinking about Sheol occurred in post-exilic times when the Hasidim (i.e. the pious ones – the spiritual ancestors of the Pharisees), complained because it appeared (according to the traditional concept of Sheol), that God would do nothing for them after death. Could it be that the God whose communion they had enjoyed on earth, and whom they had sought to serve through faithful adherence to the Torah would ultimately abandon them? The contemporary picture of Sheol as a place where the Rephaim could not praise God, repelled them. (Ps.88:10).

Already, therefore, we see the beginnings of a shift in conviction, which envisages Sheol as an intermediate state. It begins to occur to some Old Testament writers that Sheol would not be the final destiny of righteous men, for God would redeem their lives from the grave.(Ps.49:14-15; Ps.73:24-26). Sheol would remain an appropriate place for the wicked. (Ps.9:17; 22:29; 88:4f.; Pr.5:5; 7:26f.; 9:18.)³ The idea of punishment, however, does not appear, and they simply continue to exist in the "impotence or nullity of perpetual sleep." in a 'weak' state (Is. 14:10). Judgment towards the end of the Old Testament usually refers to groups and nations, and normally takes place within history.⁴

(London: SPCK., 2004), 4-7.

² An exception was made for the shades of men of fame, such as Samuel, who was credited with supernatural powers. (1 Sam.28:8ff.)

³ Philip Johnston points out that the most frequent use of the term 'Sheol' is to indicate human destiny, and predominantly the destiny of the ungodly, that is, sinners, the foolish rich, scoffers and the immoral. They could also be national enemies – Johnston, P.S., *Shades of Sheol*, (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 81.

⁴ See Smith, R.L., *Old Testament Theology*, (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 383.

The original idea of Sheol as a universal destination for the dead – a place of ‘sleep’ and rest, irrespective of moral distinctions, persisted right to the end of Old Testament times. Yet, now, alongside it, there emerged the beginnings of a belief that the righteous would rise from the dead, and share in the life of happiness which would follow the Day of Judgment. This development appeared in the biblical apocalypses, Isaiah 24-27 and Daniel 12.⁵ Sheol remained a gloomy abode of the departed, but the truly significant change in relation to the origins of an intermediate state was that the duration of the sojourn of the righteous in Sheol was limited. This idea arose in connection with belief in the resurrection of the righteous at the Last Judgment, the earliest instance of this appearing in Isaiah 26:19. They would eventually share the glories of the Messianic kingdom, while the wicked would receive due punishment for their sins. This is hinted at in a number of passages which speak of the possibility of God ‘abandoning’ the wicked to Sheol, or of God’s wrath burning in Sheol, while the righteous enjoy “eternal pleasures at God’s right hand.” (Ps.16:10; 9:17; Pr.7:29; Deut.32:22). Sheol has, therefore, become an intermediate state, and, for the first time, postmortem moral distinctions are made between good and bad. There is, however, no sign in the Old Testament, of the fate of the wicked in Sheol changing as a result of repentance and conversion. Their destiny is forever sealed by the decisions they have taken in this life, and by their character at death.

Hans Schwarz detects Zoroastrian influence in the emergence of belief in a two-fold outcome of history –

...an eternity of bliss and an eternity of woe, allotted respectively to good and evil in another life beyond the grave. There is also some kind of intermediate state for those whose good and bad deeds are in strict balance.⁶

Schwarz notes that it is no accident that similar ideas arose among the rabbis of the post-exilic period, precisely at the time when the Jews were in contact with the Medes

⁵ The new emphasis noticeable in Is. 24:21-3; 25:6-8, is referred to by Bernard Anderson as follows: “In the day of God’s victory celebration, there will be no more death, and – like a tender plant – God will wipe away all tears from human faces, and will remove the ‘reproach’ of his people Israel...In Dan. 12:1-4, the writer speaks of those members of the community of faith whose names are enrolled in the ‘book of life’”. – Anderson B.W., *Contours of Old Testament Theology*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 317-8.

⁶ Schwarz, H., *Eschatology*, (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2000), 57.

and Persians in exile. Those rabbis who had been punctilious in observing the Jewish Law would ultimately achieve a reward. Sheol then became a passing stage, or intermediate state on their way to heaven at the resurrection. Passages in the Old Testament which could be interpreted as indicating an intermediate state are Ps.9:17; 49:14; 55:15; Pr.15:11; 15:24. Study of the Sheol-Hades concept in the intertestamental period and in the New Testament will confirm this position. The advantage of studying Sheol here is that it traces the sources in the Old Testament of the later New Testament references to Hades, and this is important as belief in an intermediate state is central to the thesis.

(c) Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha

The development in Old Testament beliefs in Isaiah 24-27, and in Daniel 12 concerning a resurrection to rewards and punishment at a Last Judgment continues into, and becomes even more pronounced, in the intertestamental literature, with the significant change, that moral distinctions now begin to be made in the intermediate state after death. The tension between individual and corporate eschatology means that when individuals die, a waiting-period ensues between their deaths and the final judgment, when they will join in a general resurrection.⁷ The earliest recorded division in Sheol between the righteous and the wicked occurs in 1 Enoch 22, which dates from about 150B.C. Joseph Ratzinger locates Sheol, as described in 1 Enoch, as being no longer simply in the earth's interior, but, more specifically, in the West, the land of the setting sun, in a mountain, where it occupies four different regions (pictured as caves.)⁸ The just and the unjust are now separated. The unjust await the Judgment in darkness, whereas the just, among whom the martyrs occupy a special position, dwell in light, being assembled around a life-giving spring of water.⁹

⁷ Richard Bauckham, 'Life, Death and the After-Life' in *Life in the Face of Death* ed., Richard N. Longenecker, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1998), 87.

⁸ 1 Enoch 22:3 identifies the four compartments as follows: one for the spirits of the righteous; another for sinners who have not, in their earthly lives, been punished for the evils they have committed; a third compartment is for the martyrs; and the fourth, for sinners who have already received punishment for their sins in this life.

⁹ Joseph Ratzinger, *Eschatology, Death and Eternal Life*, (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1988), 207.

The duration of stay in Sheol is clearly temporary, and its denizens, already to some extent, anticipate their ultimate fate at the general resurrection. The righteous already know that they will be vindicated, and rewarded in glory at the last day, and the wicked, although not yet punished, can foresee the dread prospect of their condemnation. This view is expressed in 4 Ezra 7:75-101, and (Bauckham maintains) is the commonest view of the intermediate state in the Second Temple period. He also notes, however, that, according to certain writings of the period, the delights of paradise and the torments of hell are already experienced by the righteous and the wicked respectively in the intermediate state before the final resurrection - a view which was later to become the dominant one. Josephus, for example, records that the Pharisees held this view.¹⁰ Jeremias points to an ambiguity in the use of the word 'Hades'¹¹. In several references (1 En.22:1-14; 51:1; 102:5; 103:7; 2 Macc.6:23; 4 Esr.4:41;7:32; 1 Syr.Bar.11:6;21:23), it denotes the whole sphere of the dead (with their divergent destinies anticipated); but, in other texts (1 En.63:10; Ps.Sol.14:6;15:11 Wis.17.14 etc.), it refers only to the temporary sojourn of the souls of the ungodly.

Further ambiguity occurs with the usage in the 2nd Century B.C. of 'Gehenna' (Gehinnom in Hebrew). According to 1 Enoch 27:1, those who are punished in the second compartment in Sheol, are later raised to receive further punishment in 'the accursed valley' - a reference to the Valley of Hinnom (or Gehenna). This may be the first reference in this literature to 'hell', although the word itself does not appear yet. The confusion arises, because sometimes 'Gehenna' refers to Sheol as such, in other texts, to a compartment in Sheol, and sometimes, as in 1 Enoch 27:11, to a place of endless torment, subsequent to the final judgment (as in the popular understanding of 'hell'). The opposite realm or destination of the righteous is the Paradise of Delight (4 Esr.7:30;2 En.8:1-6,42:3f.), similar to the Garden of Eden, "where there is no toil, neither grief, nor mourning: but peace and exultation and life everlasting." (Test.of Abr.20.14A). The same ambiguity surrounds 'Paradise' as 'Hades'. It is not always easy to distinguish between an intermediate Paradise and the eventual resting-place of the righteous after the Last Judgment. In Rabbinic Judaism, however, the two-fold

¹⁰ Josephus, *Antiquities* 18:14.

¹¹ Jeremias, *Articles on Hades and Paradise in TDNT* (vols. 1 &5), (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1933), 147.

outcome of judgment is more marked, and a definite parting of the ways to Paradise or Gehenna occurs.

The study of Sheol, however, as an intermediate state, is the theme at present under consideration. Karl Hanhart ¹²identifies three factors which combine to indicate the emergence of teaching of an intermediate state. These are – (a) Time, an intervening period, anticipating resurrection and judgment in the future. (b) Place, where the departed have consciousness in a specific realm, and (c) The outlook of the believer. The juxtaposition of these three factors occurs only late in the intertestamental period, as, for example, in 4 Ezra 7:75ff. where we read that, seven days after their death, the souls of the righteous enter their chambers in Sheol (promptuaria), where they remain until the resurrection, when they see God's glory and rejoice in seven ways, which include victory over sin, a view of the pain of the godless and comparison between the misery of the past and the blessedness of the glorious age to come. The wicked, on the other hand, experience pain, caused by the memory of their evil ways, the knowledge that penance and good works are no longer possible, and a view of the present and future happiness of the blessed.

The fact that the wicked now experience pain, marks, in 4 Ezra, which dates from about 100A.D., a further stage of development. Enoch defers the punishment until final judgment, but, in Ezra, the pains of the godless begin in the intermediate state which becomes, as both Ratzinger and Jeremias mention, "almost a definite Hell."¹³

While it is true that the earliest idea of Sheol as a place of 'sleep' and peace and rest, persisted to the end, as was noted earlier in connection with the biblical apocalypses, the Hasidim began to believe that the old account of Sheol was too good for the wicked and too bad for the righteous.

This new division in the fate of the departed becomes even more obvious in the Book of Wisdom than in Sirach. (Wis. 1:12-5:23), where a doctrine of torture emerges in Hades for the souls of the wicked. They suffer remorse of conscience and anguish of spirit. But "the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God and no torture shall touch

¹² Karl Hanhart, *The Intermediate State in the New Testament*, (Franeker: T. Wever, 1967). 26.

them.” (Wis.3:1-4). They only “seem to have died.” (Wis.3:9). Indeed, the thought here is that the faithful will not pass into Hades at all, but will abide with God in love. They are at peace, but their ‘rest’ is an intermediate state, and not their final state.

A word should be said at this point about the development of Hebrew psychology in the intertestamental period. In the extra-biblical apocalyptic writings there is a move away from the earlier idea of ‘shades’ or ‘ghosts’ in Sheol. They are referred to, instead, as ‘souls’. (Sim. of En.; Ps. of Sol; 2 En., Test. of Abr., 4 Ezr.; 2 Bar., etc.). According to earlier understanding, the ‘spirit’ or ‘breath’ (*ruach*), left a man at his death, and he passed into a kind of undifferentiated fund, ceasing to be an individual spirit. But in the Book of Enoch, there is a change of concept, because a dead man’s spirit remains individual. (1 En.39:3-8; 41:2-4). Instead of a conception of personality wholly dependent on the body, we have the different concept of ‘soul’ or ‘spirit.’ Such spirits were discarnate – they did not have a body, but they were believed to possess form or appearance, distinct from their buried bodies, but excluding many of their functions. From 1 Enoch 9:10, we learn that they not only have consciousness, but are capable of emotional reactions. They cry and lament, and they are capable of pain and pleasure in the form of punishment or reward. Having said this, however, it must be emphasised that the life of departed souls in Sheol was incomplete, particularly in its fellowship with God. To some degree, their life was still ‘shadowy’ and would remain so until the resurrection, when, once again, their personalities could be fully expressed.

As the main focus of this thesis will centre upon the possibility of moral and spiritual change, and indeed, conversion, in the intermediate state, is there any sign of this idea emerging in the intertestamental period? The prevailing view in the apocalyptic books is that the fateful decisions regarding human destiny are taken in this life and cannot be posthumously reversed. (1 En.5:5; 22:8-11; Dan.12:10; 2 Bar.85:11-15)¹⁴ The souls of the departed are unable to repent (2 En.62:2), and there can be no communication by way of prayer either for, or by, the departed.¹⁵ Nevertheless, there are a few books

¹³ Ratzinger, op.cit., 121. (cf. Jeremias, op.cit., 147).

¹⁴ “Each of them has prepared for his own soul torment to come, and each of them has chosen for himself, glories to come.” (2 Bar. 54:15).

¹⁵ “There shall not be there....a change of ways, nor place of prayer, or sending of petitions, nor receiving of knowledge, nor giving of love, nor place of repentance, nor supplication for offences, nor intercession of the fathers, nor prayer of the prophets, nor help of the righteous.” (2 Baruch 85:12).

where a contrary opinion is expressed –that change can occur through the power of intercessory prayer.¹⁶

Jeffrey A. Trumbower identifies 2 Maccabees 12:39-45 also, as a passage where “a salvific ritual for the posthumous forgiveness of sins was seen as possible and desirable.”¹⁷ The passage describes how Judas Maccabaeus and his men brought back the bodies of some Jews who had been killed while fighting for the independence of their community. They had been wearing sacred tokens of the idols of Jamnia which the Jewish law forbade. Judas and his followers prayed that the sin might be blotted out. His real concern was to prevent the survivors from being contaminated by the sin, but the narrator of 2 Maccabees, Jason of Cyrene, writing in the late 2nd or early 1st century B.C., thought that a collection which Judas had organised for a sacrificial sin-offering was for the posthumous salvation of individual sinners. Jason adhered to the same understanding of a posthumous division between the righteous and the wicked, as is found, for example, in Daniel 12:3. One would therefore have expected that the dead soldiers, who had sinned by wearing tokens of idolatry, would be included among the wicked, destined for punishment. Yet, in a time of fierce nationalism, it looks as if they were still considered, despite their sinfulness, as part of the nation. Nevertheless, it is surprising that postmortem salvation is even deemed to be possible, in this period, for sinners.

Trumbower goes on to indicate two other passages where intercession for the dead is mentioned.¹⁸ One is the Testament of Abraham 14:1-5, probably dating from around 100A.D. Here, Abraham prays to God to have mercy on some who have already died. He gains release for a soul whose sins were exactly equal to his righteous deeds (14:1-5), and, in another case, he obtains pardon for sinners he had erroneously cursed and destroyed during his lifetime (14:10-15).¹⁹

¹⁶ Thus the angels pray for the departed Adam (Apoc. of Moses 35:2), and the sun and the moon intercede on his behalf (36:1). Great store is set by the prayers of great and godly men like Enoch and Abraham and Moses who, though themselves among the departed, are able to intercede on behalf of others.

¹⁷ Jeffrey A. Trumbower, *Rescue for the Dead: The Posthumous Salvation of non-Christians in Early Christianity*. (Oxford: University Press, 2001), 26f.

¹⁸ Trumbower, *ibid.*, 29.

¹⁹ E.P. Sanders remarks that – “This may be the earliest instance in Jewish sources in which intercessory prayer is considered effective after the death of the person on whose behalf it is offered.” – Sanders, E.P., *The Testament of Abraham in Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. Charlesworth J.H., (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1983-85), 891 n.14b.

The other Jewish text noted by Trumbower, on the issue of posthumous forgiveness is 4 Ezra dating from shortly after 70A.D.²⁰ In 4 Ezra 7:82, the angel reveals to Ezra that in the period between death and the Final Judgment, wicked souls “cannot now repent and do good that they may live.” Ezra then asks in 7:102-103 –

Whether on the day of judgment, the righteous will be able to intercede for the ungodly, or to entreat the Most High for them, fathers for sons, or sons for fathers, brothers for brothers, relatives for their kinsmen, or friends for friends.

But the angel, (no doubt expressing the author’s view), answers ‘no’ to Ezra’s question, whereupon Ezra complains that such harshness is inconsistent with the biblical tradition in which, for example, Elijah intercedes for a dead child. (4 Ezra 7:109). Trumbower interestingly comments –

Ezra’s clear articulation of his request for intercession, as well as the vehemence with which the angel refutes it, may reflect a real debate among Jews at the end of the 1st century A.D.²¹

In these passages, the possibility of postmortem forgiveness was believed to occur at the final judgment, but, if so, then one must surmise that the sinful dead were in some kind of intermediate state, awaiting that Judgment. As has already been noted, in many places, in the intertestamental literature, such waiting souls were located in Hades – the location understood, not literally, but symbolically or figuratively. The concept of ‘Hades’ as an intermediate state is carried forward into the New Testament, for the Jews of Jesus’ day inherited, many of the ideas which were current in the two preceding centuries.

(d) The Eschatology of Qumran

When studying the intertestamental period attention must also be paid to the sectarian literature of Qumran, which presents a confusing and obscure picture. The theology of the sectaries confirms that of the early apocalypses of Enoch and Daniel, in envisaging

²⁰ Trumbower, op.cit., 30.

²¹ Trumbower, ibid., 31.

the idea of reward and punishment beyond death, and the direct influence of the apocalypses can be detected in the writings of Qumran. According to John Collins, the principal sectarian rule books indicate that as soon as the earthly life of an individual is ended, that person experiences the eternal reward and punishment. There is, therefore, no need for a general resurrection.²² The main emphasis in the Scrolls lies in the idea that eternal life is rooted in the cultic experience of the sect. The members, although still subject to the evils of earthly life, are already thought to be sharing the life of the angels in their community. This is a transcendent experience which ushers the faithful, at death, into life with the angels in heaven.

The Qumran literature makes no mention of resurrection, yet the punishment of the wicked is postmortem perdition, and so, presumably, the reward for the righteous of eternal life extends beyond death. The absence of reference to resurrection probably means that the Essenes do not believe in the resurrection of the body, but rather the Greek idea of the immortality of the soul. It is the spirit or *nephesh* which lives on, either in fellowship with the angels, or to suffer torture in the netherworld.

The shape of Qumran theology, however, as portrayed by Alex Deasley, for example, is more confused than Collins's understanding. Deasley follows Collins in noting the significant temporal dimension of Qumran eschatology. He calls attention to its stress on the restoration of fallen humanity to its original glory at creation. God will purify the individual and, at the time of his final visitation, extinguish evil for ever²³. Deasley identifies –

a quasi-millennial conception according to which there eventuates on earth, and within time, a real, though limited, measure of the life of eternity.²⁴

The interesting question which arises for this thesis is whether Qumran theology has a conception of an intermediate state, and here, the picture is obscure.²⁵ Deasley's

²² Collins, J.J., *Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 129.,

²³ 'Discourse on the Two Spirits' in *Community Rule*, IV. 17b-19a.

²⁴ Deasley, Alex., *The Shape of Qumran Theology*, (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2000), 294.

²⁵ Deasley frames the question as follows – "If recompense comes to the departed, through the visitation of judgment at the time of death, how is this visitation related to God's visitation at the end? In particular, is the renewed world one in which the faithful departed have a share, and, if so, is resurrection the gateway by which they enter it? If this is the case, then resurrection implies some sort of intermediate state between this

conclusion is that there is tension in the Qumran literature between the life to come seen as a temporal extension of this life with the recreation of the nation in quasi-millennial terms, and the life to come viewed transcendentally. There is a further lack of clarity as to the point of entry into the after-life – at death, or at the general resurrection. Qumran appears to hold both elements together, without reconciling them, and fails, therefore, to provide a single, coherent picture.²⁶

(e) The New Testament Background

The variation in conceptions of Hades in later Judaism – different views as to who goes to Hades and for how long – is reflected in the New Testament, which complements and expands Old Testament teaching. As in the Old Testament, so in the New, the word ‘Hades’ often accompanying the word ‘death’ usually means the ‘realm of the dead’ (Acts 2:27,31; Rev. 1:18; 6:8; 20:13; Matt. 11:23; 16:18). In some passages, it denotes a place of assembly for all souls, as in Acts 2:27,31. In other passages, there seems to be a double view, teaching that there is an intermediate state of conscious existence, both for the righteous and the wicked, though Hades itself tends to be used only of the place of punishment for the wicked. The souls of the ungodly languish in an underworld at the heart of the Earth. (1 Peter 3:19). According to Rev.20:13, this is also the abode of non-Christians.

The principal passages in the New Testament’s synoptic tradition, with a bearing on an intermediate state, are the parable of Dives and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31), and our Lord’s conversation with the penitent thief on the Cross. (Luke 23:43). In both passages, there is a close link with ideas which were common in later Judaism, and Jesus uses imagery familiar to the Jews of his day from the intertestamental apocalyptic literature. Hades is depicted in Luke 16:19-31, very much as it was in Ethiopian Enoch 22, which would represent the popular view of the time. After death, men and women go to Sheol, each ‘to his or her proper place’, borne thither by angels, or carried off by emissaries of the devil. An example of this, is Judas, who leaves the apostolic ministry

life and the life of eternity.” – Deasley, op.cit., 298. Deasley, however, quotes the opposite opinion from E. Puech “that the prevailing view at Qumran was in harmony with Daniel 12:2-3, namely, that resurrection was the prelude to judgment which resulted in either everlasting life or everlasting condemnation.” – Puech, E., *La Croyance des Esseniens en la Vie Future: Immortalité, resurrection, vie éternelle*, (Paris: Gabalda, 1993).

“to go where he belongs” (Acts 1:25). Both Enoch and Luke envisage there being in paradise, a fountain of water springing up, while hell, for both writers, is the place of torment by fire. The intermediate condition after death is noticeable. It is temporary, and lasts only till the Day of Judgment. When that Day comes, and not before, the separation of spirits, mentioned by Jesus in Matt. 13:25 and Mark 9:43ff., occurs, when some pass to the glory of the world to come, while others go to Gehenna. This understanding of an intermediate state in the New Testament is the traditional interpretation, and it coheres well with the position taken in this thesis which promotes the intermediate state as a temporary period, as distinct from a permanent hell.

The objection is sometimes made, however, that the parable does not provide relevant information about the life to come, because its purpose was to illustrate the danger of wealth (Luke 16:24), and the need for repentance (Luke 16:28-30). Yet it seems undeniable that it refers to the intermediate state, as the resurrection of the dead and the final judgment have not yet occurred (Luke 16:27-31). While Jesus was not concerned to teach details about the existence of the intermediate state, he would not require to invent a non-existent state to make his point of the need for repentance in this life, to avoid punishment in the next. As in the rest of his teaching, Jesus used illustrations from the real world, and this would also be so in this case.

A number of features of the intermediate state are implied by these two passages in Luke. According to some verses in the New Testament (e.g. Mark 5:39; 1 Thess. 5:10; John 11:11-12 etc.), the souls of the dead are said to be ‘asleep’, but this is usually a figurative expression for death, suggested by the outward resemblance of a dead body to a sleeping one. The doctrine commonly held by the Jews was that believers after death were in a dreamy, semi-conscious state, neither happy nor miserable, awaiting the resurrection body. Yet, in the parable of Dives and Lazarus, it is a state of conscious existence for both the righteous and the wicked – for the righteous, a state of joy; for the wicked, a state of suffering. The parable indicates that there is consciousness of surroundings (vv.23-24), memory of the past (vv.27-28), and rational thought (v.30), and therefore Jesus must have sanctioned these characteristics of the intermediate state. The Gospels, therefore, seem to agree with the prevalent Jewish idea that the deceased,

²⁶ Deasley, op.cit., 301.

whether in paradise or Sheol, still bear some resemblance to what they have been. Dives and Lazarus are mutually visible in paradise and Hades, and appear to have the same bodily parts as they had on earth. It is also worth noting that Moses and Elijah appear recognisably at the Transfiguration. This raises questions about the traditional view which maintains that the departed are disembodied in the intermediate state. The view here that human beings in the intermediate state are conscious is a necessary presupposition for this thesis as it allows the possibility of conversion and sanctification in this interim period.

Another implication of the parable has created a certain amount of theological confusion. The dominant view in the New Testament asserts that judgment will coincide with the coming of the Son of Man in glory (Matt.25:31-46). Yet Luke 16:22 implies that, after the death of the individual, his or her disembodied soul goes to 'Abraham's bosom', or paradise, or Sheol, having already been judged, presumably at death. The divine verdict upon his life is pronounced prior to the resurrection. The same implication arises in Luke 23:43, when Jesus promises the penitent thief an immediate place in paradise. There is no doubt that these passages shift the emphasis away from the Last Judgment, to what our souls have done before and after death. This theory of a double judgment established itself as the normal teaching of the western Church. All that was left to the general judgment was the resurrection of the body, and the consequent rewarding or punishing of the body. This thesis would contend that judgment is a process which would not be finalised until the final consummation or Last Judgment.

One other passage in the New Testament suggests an interim punishment of the ungodly (2 Peter 2:9). It speaks of the Lord "holding the unrighteous for the Day of Judgment, while continuing their punishment." This verse, therefore, confirms the picture of Dives in the parable and his judgment.

The two Lukan passages under consideration, then, provide considerable evidence of a double aspect of waiting for the final judgment – a state which, for the believer, means a foretaste of heaven, and for the unbeliever, a foretaste of damnation. At least this minimum can therefore be said about the intermediate state, that the Christian's communion with his Lord is affirmed. The presence of Christ in the intermediate state

is vital for the argument of the thesis, as conversion of the unevangelised depends upon a postmortem encounter with Christ.

It has, however, to be said, that there has been fairly widespread opposition by New Testament scholars to the traditional understanding of an intermediate state in these two passages. J.M. Creed, for example, says that there is nothing here to imply that an intermediate state is pictured. He goes on to note that the rich man alone is in Hades, and that Hades here is being used as almost equivalent to Gehenna.²⁷

W. Strawson notes that in Luke 16:26, Abraham, in addressing Dives, alludes to “a great chasm fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.” Strawson sees here “an unchangeable and final division”, which rules out any possibility of an intermediate state.²⁸

It seems however, that no such dogmatic conclusions can be drawn from this detail. As the story is a parable, not every detail can be taken literally. It cannot be assumed, for example, that the abodes of the saved and the lost are in close proximity, and that intercourse takes place between the two classes. Nevertheless, B.H. Streeter makes an interesting observation on the ‘great gulf fixed’ when he says that there is no need to think of the gulf in spatial terms. It could, instead, be “one of quality of life, expressing itself in feeling and character.” In this way, saint and sinner could converse with one another in the next world.²⁹

Another theologian who rejects an intermediate state is Stephen Travis. The traditional view is that the believing dead are with Christ in a disembodied form (Luke 23:43), waiting to receive their resurrection bodies with the return of Christ. Yet, Travis wonders why the New Testament writers did not tell us more clearly, if this indeed was the case. He claims that texts such as Luke 23:43 and Philippians 1:23 show no hint that ‘being with Christ’ is only an interim stage before the resurrection.³⁰

²⁷ Creed, J.M., *The Gospel according to St Luke*, (London: Macmillan, 1950), 212.

²⁸ Strawson, W., *Jesus and the Future Life*, (London: Epworth, 1970), 211. Jeremias makes the same point – “The gulf expresses the irrevocability of God’s judgment; hence Jesus knows no doctrine of purgatory.” – Jeremias, J., *Rediscovering the Parables*, (London: SCM., 1966), 130.

²⁹ Streeter, B.H. (ed.), *Immortality*, (London: Macmillan, 1930), 137.

C.Ryder Smith also rejects any notion of Hades being temporary, believing that the reference in the parable is probably to Gehenna, which is located in Hades, and that the wicked arrive there when they die.³¹

In keeping with his contention that death itself and one's character at the moment of death are the deciding factors in determining one's destiny, Karl Rahner also disposes of an intermediate state.³²

Karl Hanhart, perhaps, speaks representatively for those opposed to an intermediate state, when he says that the thief's words to Jesus on the Cross 'when you come into your Kingdom' refers to "Jesus's ascendancy to the Messianic throne." Paradise is the opposite of hell, and v.43 "does not of itself speak of a limited period of waiting in paradise."³³

Opinion, therefore, among New Testament scholars is sharply divided as to whether the Lukan passages affirm the existence of an intermediate state. As will become obvious later, preference is given in this thesis to the views of traditionalists such as Cullmann and Stauffer. An intermediate state is essential if there is to be any hope of conversion for the unevangelised after death.

Consideration must now be given to some other passages in the Gospels which might suggest an intermediate state. Jesus, for example, in Matthew 10:28 comforts his apostles by assuring them that they need have no fear of those who will kill the body, but cannot kill the soul. Modern exegetes are unhappy about such a text as it denies the psychosomatic unity of a human being, but it does harmonise well with the traditional view of a disembodied soul surviving death. Also, the story of the Transfiguration implies that the saints, in this case, Moses and Elijah, live gloriously in the intermediate state amid the transcendent splendour of paradise. (Matthew 17:4).

³⁰ Travis, Stephen, H., *I Believe in the Second Coming of Jesus*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1982) 174.

³¹ Ryder Smith, C., *The Biblical Doctrine of the Hereafter*, (London: Epworth Press, 1958), 172.

³² Rahner believes that "it is by no means certain that the doctrine about the intermediate state is anything more than an intellectual framework or way of thinking... When we read in the New Testament that, at the moment of death, a person is already 'in Paradise' or 'with Christ', this only means, that death too, belongs to the powers and forces which ultimately cannot harm the man or woman who lives through faith in Christ" - Rahner, K., *Theological Investigations*, vol.17, (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1981), 115, 117.

³³ Hanhart, *op.cit.*, 212f.

The famous verse, John 14:2, “In my Father’s house are many resting-places”, according to William Temple’s well-known interpretation, seems to give clear support to there being an intermediate state. Temple describes the resting-places as ‘wayside caravanserais’ – shelters at stages along the road where travellers may rest on their journey. Hanhart disputes this, and believes that “it refers not to an intermediate, but to a final abode.”³⁴ But, surely, this is not what Temple meant, for he explains that there are many resting-places on the long pilgrimage to perfection, and the Lord goes on before to prepare them for us³⁵ This text is particularly helpful to the argument of this thesis as it implies stages in the process of spiritual development on the way to heaven.

Jeremias sees many references in the Gospels to the intermediate state (e.g. John 12:26; Mark 13:27), and also in Acts 7:59, maintaining that the New Testament writers are unanimous in “presenting communion with Christ as the specifically Christian view of the intermediate state.”³⁶

The principal passages in the Letters of St Paul, associated with belief in an intermediate state, are 2 Corinthians 5: 1-10 and Philippians 1:23, but here again, as in the Lukan passages, opinion among scholars is sharply divided. The main *crux* occurs in 2 Corinthians 5:2-3 – “Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked,” and also in v.8 – “We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body, and at home with the Lord.” vv.2-4 refer to receiving a new body at the Parousia, but the fear of being “found naked” could refer to the intermediate state. These words could mean, at least in part, a desire not to be bodiless, but to share in the full glory of God. The early views of Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and 1 Corinthians 15 imply sleep in a bodiless existence, perhaps in Sheol. C.K.Barrett notes, that because sleep is timeless,

³⁴ Hanhart, *ibid.*, 191.

³⁵ Temple writes – “It may be that we are still far from perfect fellowship with the Father... We have a long journey of many days before us ere our pilgrimage is accomplished. But there are by God’s mercy many resting-places. Otherwise of what avail would be the promise of the Lord to prepare a place for us? If it were only in the realm of ultimate attainment, would he mock us with the promise of a welcome there?... The Lord calls us to absolute perfection; but he points us here and now to what is for each one the next stage, the next resting-place on the way to it... There is no special reference to the final stage.” – Temple, W., *Readings in St John’s Gospel*, (London: Macmillan, 1955), 226-7.

³⁶ Jeremias, J., article on ‘Paradise’ in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1933), 769.

This immortality is not an intellectually and individualistically conceived survival, but only a hope.³⁷

When, however, attention is paid to 2 Corinthians, there is a shift of emphasis, because of Paul's brush with death, and the possibility of his having to face death before the Parousia. v.8 shows that Paul had ceased to think of the intermediate state as simply sleep, but looked forward to a conscious condition of happiness, and that indeed his postmortem state was much to be preferred to this life. Even if the believer is bodiless, Paul believed, he is in conscious enjoyment of the Lord's presence. The fact that Paul has already received the Spirit 'as an earnest' enables him to overcome his horror of nakedness. A further source of satisfaction is that, though death might mean temporary nakedness, it would also mean freedom from earthly frustration.

The above traditional interpretation as an intermediate state has been widely questioned in modern times. It has, for example, been charged with inconsistency. On the one hand, Paul is said to want to live on in his earthly existence until the Parousia, so as to avoid the disembodied state of 'nakedness'. This intermediate state is essentially undesirable, because it is a less than fully human existence. But, on the other hand, he is said to want to leave the body, so that he can go to be with the Lord now. As Paul says in another letter (Philippians 1:21-26), his desire is to depart and be with Christ. So, according to the traditional view, the intermediate state is both desirable and undesirable.³⁸

Paul Fiddes raises a different objection. The traditional view rests on an understanding of the soul being disembodied in the intermediate state, thus combining Greek notions of the soul with Hebrew ideas of resurrection. Fiddes rejects this interpretation of 'being naked', and he does not believe that it describes the intermediate state.³⁹

³⁷ Barrett, C.K., "Immortality and Resurrection", in C.S. Duthie (ed.), *Resurrection and Immortality*, (London: Samuel Bagster & Sons Ltd., 1979), 86.

³⁸ W.L. Craig, however, in "Paul's Dilemma in 2 Cor.5:1-10: A Catch-22", in *New Testament Studies*, 34 (1988), 145-147, concludes "that there is no inconsistency in the traditional interpretation. Rather, the appearance of inconsistency arises out of a paradoxical situation in which Paul was placed, and the catch-22 decision which confronted him".

³⁹ Fiddes says: "But the feeling of the passage is quite against this. Paul makes no reference to the soul, and finds being 'unclothed' a deeply undesirable state, where, in the thought of Plato and Philo, the soul longs to rid itself of the weight of the body and be naked. Being 'naked' is not meant to describe the intermediate

Hanhart, in keeping with his general dismissal of all ideas of an intermediate state, believes that 'nakedness' stands for the shame of unrighteousness, and refers not to natural death, but to eternal death.⁴⁰ This is also Calvin's view, interpreting 'nakedness' in a moral sense, as being without the righteousness with which one must be clothed before the tribunal of Christ.⁴¹

The desire to be "with the Lord", Hanhart believes, refers not to an intermediate state, but to the new age. This opinion is also held by E. Earle Ellis who maintains that 'nakedness' has the connotation of guilt and judgment, and will not be at death, but at the Parousia⁴².

Ronald Berry's understanding, however, of vv.1-2 is in line with J.A.T. Robinson's belief that v.1 does not refer to the spiritual body of the individual, but to the Body of Christ, the Church. Paul is longing (in v.2), for that 'clothing' at the Parousia which will signify "the perfection of the body in its corporateness." In Berry's view, the 'nakedness' is "the loneliness of separation from those he serves and whose fellowship is precious."⁴³

This, is a persuasive argument which gives powerful support to the concept of an intermediate state. The traditional view that Paul envisages an intermediate state is also supported by C.K. Barrett who maintains that Paul was thinking of an interval of bodilessness between death and the coming of the Lord.⁴⁴ Barrett comes to this conclusion as a deduction from Paul's thinking in 1 Cor.15:35ff. The interval between the sowing of a seed, and its fruition (1 Cor.15:37-38) implies a period of waiting. Although the 'nakedness' of the bodiless state is undesirable for Paul, it does not separate the deceased from God's love as Phil.1:23 – 'with Christ' – makes clear. The

state, but is an image for the non-being with which death confronts us." – Fiddes, P., *The Promised End*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 101.

⁴⁰ Hanhart, op.cit., 127.

⁴¹ Matera, F.J., *II Corinthians: A Commentary*. (Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 121.

⁴² Ellis, E. Earl, "2 Corinthians in Pauline Eschatology" in *New Testament Studies*, 6 (1959-60), 220-1.

⁴³ Berry, R., "Death and Life in Christ – the Meaning of 2 Corinthians 5:1-10," in *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 14 (1961), 75.

⁴⁴ Barrett, C.K., *A Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1973), 154-5.

Philippians text is important for the conclusion of this thesis as the presence of Christ in the intermediate state, both for the onward sanctification of believers, and for the conversion of the unevangelised is necessary. J.D.G. Dunn is less confident, and considers it to be a 'moot question', whether, in view of possible development in Paul's thought, he envisaged an intermediate state. What Dunn does believe to be certain is that Paul believed that there was an "incompleteness in the process of salvation, which can only be resolved by the new body of resurrection."⁴⁵

Further arguments have been advanced in opposition to the traditional viewpoint. David Wenham links v.3 – "we will not be found naked" – with Jesus's eschatological teaching in Luke 12:36-38, where he urges wakefulness, that is (among other things), keeping one's clothes on, and having one's loins girded.⁴⁶

This, appears to be extremely far-fetched and unlikely. A much weightier contention is advanced by a number of scholars, including G.B. Caird, T.F. Torrance and B. Reichenbach. These theologians refer to the problematical nature of time after death. Caird, for example, points to the fact that when Paul thought of death as sleep, he may have been reflecting on the similarity between sleep followed by waking, and death followed by the Day of Christ. From our conscious angle, time is suspended while we are asleep. In the same way, after death, the next thing we may be aware of is entering the presence of Christ, and we all do this simultaneously.⁴⁷ Such a view comprehensively disposes of an intermediate state. From a slightly different angle, Torrance reaches the same conclusion.

Looked at from the perspective of the new creation, there is no gap between the death of the believer, and the Parousia of Christ, but, looked at from the perspective of time that decays and crumbles away, there is a lapse between them.⁴⁸

The relationship between time and eternity is a considerable philosophical problem. which would require more extended treatment than is possible here. Suffice it to say,

⁴⁵ Dunn, J.D.G., *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1998), 489.

⁴⁶ Wenham, D., "Being 'found' on the Last Day. New Light on 2 Corinthians 5:3," in *New Testament Studies*, 33 (1987), 477-8.

⁴⁷ Caird, G.B., *New Testament Theology*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 272.

⁴⁸ Torrance, T.F., *Space, Time and Resurrection*, (Edinburgh: T&T. Clark, 1976), 102.

that plenty of theologians (for example, notably Cullmann), envisage postmortem time as sequential. This would require to be the case if there is to be postmortem spiritual growth, which presupposes the temporal categories of past, present and future.

The opinion of Reichenbach that there is no postmortem consciousness in an intermediate period appears to contradict many of the scriptural passages mentioned earlier in this chapter.⁴⁹

The interpretations of Philippians 1:23, where Paul says: "I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better." vary along similar lines to those of 2 Corinthians 5. Ellis, for example, believes that this verse in Philippians does have the intermediate state in view, and therefore offers a parallel to our Lord's promise to the penitent thief (Luke 23:43).⁵⁰

Gordon J. Spykman speculates that Paul's preference for the intermediate state disposes of the old idea that it was an unreal, sleepy or dreamlike condition. In an arresting metaphor, he writes that "Death is not the doorway to a geriatric waiting-room, where life is suspended." Paul could not have conceived our after-life as soul-sleep or unconscious existence. If he had, he would not have thought that departing and being with the Lord was 'far better.'⁵¹ This understanding follows views which F.F. Bruce had expressed when expounding 2 Cor.5. In order for the desire expressed in Phil.1:23 'to be with Christ', to be realised, Bruce holds that "some kind of new embodiment is necessary at death." For Paul, "a body of some kind was essential to personality"⁵². What he shrank from was any kind of spiritual nakedness or isolation. This appears preferable to the traditional view that 'nakedness' implies disembodiment. Modern

⁴⁹ Reichenbach holds similar views to Torrance. Speaking in particular of Luke 23:43 and Philippians 1:23, he says of these passages – "They are not speaking of objective time, but rather subjective time. Though the time between death and resurrection is objectively long, subjectively, it is experienced as immediate. The reason for this is that, in the interim, there is no consciousness, for there is no individual to be conscious. And without consciousness, there can be no awareness of passing time. Thus, Paul can say that to die is to be with (to experience) Christ (at the next conscious moment)." – Reichenbach, B., *Is Man the Phoenix?* (Washington: University Press of America, 1983), 185.

⁵⁰ Ellis, E.Earl, "Present and Future Eschatology in Luke", in *New Testament Studies*, 12 (1965-66), 27ff.

⁵¹ Spykman, G.J., *Reformational Theology: A New Paradigm for Doing Dogmatics*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1992), 551.

⁵² Bruce, F.F., "Paul on Immortality" in *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 24 (1971), 469.

views on the holistic nature of the personality (body and soul inextricably combined)

⁵³ support Bruce's view that:

physical death will mean no hiatus of disembodiment, but the immediate enjoyment of being 'at home with the Lord.'⁵⁴

This, in no way, need deny an intermediate state, but argues for a spiritual body in advance of the Parousia. This makes sound sense, as the spiritual body is already being formed in this life, through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. Bruce admits, however, that it is difficult to distinguish the new body immediately available at death from the spiritual body to be received when the last trumpet sounds. (1 Cor.15:32). The spiritual body which we receive at death (2 Cor.5:1-2) is referred to as *oikodome*, which may have a suggestion of something under construction, something that God is preparing for his people (cf. John 14:2). William Lillie agrees with many other scholars in rejecting J.A.T. Robinson's belief that it refers to the Body of Christ, but makes the interesting suggestion that when the individual receives the *oikodome* at death, he or she "may be more capable of intimate relationship with others and with Christ himself than the 'earthly tent' ever was."⁵⁵ This may be true because the spiritual body would not suffer from the limitations of language or the impossibility of sharing another person's actual sensations of pain – conditions which affect our physical bodies.

As one might expect, however, Hanhart opposes this position, believing that "the finale of man's story is the moment of death." and that the words 'with Christ' belong to the new age and the new creation.⁵⁶

H.H. Rex agrees, in opposition to Cullmann, who is wholeheartedly committed to the intermediate state, believing that it brings believers into a "special proximity to Christ".⁵⁷

⁵³ Paul's confidence was that God would provide for believers (if not necessarily for others), "a changed psycho-somatic organism which envelops and pervades the whole personality" – Ellis, op.cit., 219.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, 469.

⁵⁵ Lillie, W., "An Approach to II Corinthians 5:1-10" in *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 30, (1977), 67.

⁵⁶ Hanhart, op.cit., 71, 193.

⁵⁷ Cullmann, O., *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Body*, (London: Epworth Press, 1958), 52-3. Rex maintains – "One fails to see what being could conceivably enjoy that 'special proximity' if we are to think of a being without a body, and of which it must not be said, that it has an immortal soul." – Rex, H.H., "Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Body or What?" in *The Reformed Theological Review*, vol. 17.3 (1958), 75.

A number of other Pauline passages, which tend towards universalism, may imply an intermediate state. For example, Ephesians 1:10, envisages God “bringing all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.” Colossians 1:20 speaks of God’s plan “to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth, or things in heaven.” In 1 Corinthians 15:25,28, Paul asserts that “Christ must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet...When he has done this, then the Son of Man himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.” Romans 11:32 is clearly of universal importance – “For God has bound all men over to disobedience, so that he may have mercy on them all.” The best case of all for holding that Paul believed in the final salvation of all souls is founded on the closing verses of the hymn in Philippians 2:9-11, which ends with the vision of the glorified universe in its peace and concord. The universalist hope extends beyond the writings of Paul – for example, to 2 Peter 3:9 – “The Lord is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” These texts underpin an important axiom of opentheism, namely the view that God makes salvation universally accessible.

It is possible that these universalist passages imply an intermediate state. The promise that God “will be all in all” quite obviously fails to find fulfilment in this earthly life, as many scriptural passages (e.g. our Lord’s parable of the Wheat and the Tares) indicate. So, when and where does the reconciling death of Christ on the Cross succeed in saving all souls? Some modern Roman Catholic scholars, notably Rahner and Boros, maintain that the reconciliation occurs at the death of the individual. Yet, this would negate any opportunity for growth in grace after death – and still poses the temporal problem of squaring individual salvation with the final corporate consummation. If these passages mean that God will ultimately save everyone, it seems much more likely that this would happen after a period of probation in an intermediate state, than at death, or in heaven.

A number of other New Testament passages contain hints of an intermediate state. The author of the Letter to the Hebrews is ambiguous on the subject. Hebrews 9:27 speaks of “man, being destined to die once, and after that, to face judgment.” It could be, and has been, interpreted as declaring that the final, public judgment, and not simply a private judgment, takes place for the individual immediately after death. Yet, Hebrews 11:39-40 affirms: “These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received

what had been promised. God had planned something better for us, so that only together with us, would they be made perfect.” Here there can be found the concept of an intermediate state where human beings lack something which they would require in order to be truly normal and completely happy. These verses conceive the intermediate state as a state of waiting. A similar idea is suggested in Revelation 6:9-11, where the souls of the martyrs wait “under the altar”. This does not denote ‘Heaven’, for their condition is incompatible with the restfulness, satisfaction and perfection which will characterise heaven.⁵⁸

Loraine Boettner claims that one of the clearest references to those in the intermediate state occurs later in the same book – “Then I heard a voice from Heaven say, ‘Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.’ ‘Yes’, says the Spirit, ‘they will rest from their labour, for their deeds will follow them.’” (Revelation 14:13).⁵⁹

Further clear references to an intermediate state are contained in 2 Peter 2:4,9, which pictures evildoers ‘resting in torment’ till the Judgment Day. The New Testament says little about the condition of the ungodly in the intermediate state, since its chief concern is with the future of God’s people, but 2 Peter 2:9 says that “the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.” What is described here is obviously not the final judgment of the ungodly, but a punishment that precedes Judgment Day. This verse, therefore, confirms the pre-Judgment Day punishment of Dives in Luke 16:19-31. A similar point of view is expressed in Jude 6, where fallen angels “are kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day.” These texts are compatible with the conclusion towards which this thesis is working, that the

⁵⁸ Reichenbach enters a caveat with reference to this interpretation in these words – “Lest one fall prey to the temptation of taking this passage as teaching about the ontological intermediate state of the deceased, it must be emphasised that the entire context of the book is one of symbolism, allegory and metaphor. It should not be taken literally as a teaching about the existence of disembodied souls during the interim. Also, the souls here mentioned are hardly disembodied.” – Reichenbach, *op.cit.*, 186. Edward Kettner, however, takes the opposite side, declaring that John describes the martyrs as being alive and conscious, and as having received their white robes, while at the same time awaiting final vindication before the world. Since these souls are told to wait for their final vindication even as they receive their white robes, the view of R.H. Charles and G.B. Caird – that these robes are the spiritual bodies in which the faithful are to be clothed in the resurrection life – is untenable. Rather, the white robe is better understood as a symbol of blessedness and purity, of the honours of victory, and of the reward of grace, but not the resurrection body.” – Kettner, E., “Time, Eternity and the Intermediate State” in *Concordia Journal*, (1985), vol. 12,212.

⁵⁹ Boettner, L., *op.cit.*, 151.

intermediate state will provide for evildoers a purgatorial opportunity for healing and cleansing.

It would appear, then, after surveying all the New Testament evidence, and the conflicting views of theologians for and against an intermediate state, that the balance of probability lies in its favour. The intermediate state is clearly of limited duration, and, throughout the New Testament, serves only an interim purpose. It receives souls after death, and delivers them up again at the Resurrection. "Death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death." (Revelation 20:13-14). The Resurrection, then, constitutes the end of Hades, and it is replaced by Gehenna as the final place of punishment.

One might well ask what are the forces which drive the development of the idea of an intermediate state. One of these would be the tension between individual and corporate eschatology because of the interval between individual deaths and the general resurrection at the final judgment. Another would be the evolution of the idea through the Old Testament concept of Sheol, developing into the New Testament concept of Hades. Yet another, particularly arising out of the experience of Paul, is the delay in the arrival of the Parousia. This would account for the change in Paul's thinking between 1 Cor. and 2 Cor. 1 Cor.15 is concerned primarily with corporate hope of the Church, and places the resurrection at the Second Advent. Paul becomes increasingly concerned about the fate of believers who die before the Parousia. As he reflects upon their spiritual regeneration in this life, he becomes convinced that death will not separate them from Christ, and he becomes unhappy with the traditional idea that they will sleep until the final consummation. A higher degree of consciousness is required. Therefore the emphasis in 2 Cor.5 is on the destiny of the individual believer, for whom death inaugurates a deeper communion between himself and his Lord (v.8b). Hence, the development of the idea of an intermediate state.

The foregoing investigation into the biblical evidence for an intermediate state is meant to prepare the way for consideration of the possibility of posthumous conversion. It has already been noted that the Old Testament holds out no such hope. The question must now be asked whether there are any signs in the New Testament of salvation for

unbelievers after death. The main emphasis in the New Testament is laid upon the need for decision for or against Christ in this life, and upon the Parousia, rather than upon what might happen in an intermediate state.

Nevertheless, a number of texts indicate the possibility of posthumous conversion. The principal ones are those which refer to the descent of Christ to Hades (e.g. 1 Peter 3:18 and 4:6), consideration of which is postponed until Chapter 3. One of the other relevant texts is 1 Corinthians 5:5 – “..hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed, and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.” It is possible that Paul could be hoping here that excommunication will cause the man to repent in this life.⁶⁰

Also, as has already been noted, a number of texts, such as Romans 11:32 and 1 Corinthians 15:24-28, may imply universal salvation, which would probably entail the posthumous salvation of some people. There is little doubt, at any rate, that this would be God’s desire as 2 Peter 3:9 makes plain – “The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance.” Another important text is 1 Corinthians 15:29 – “Now if there is no resurrection of the dead, what will those do who are baptised for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptised for them?” The practice of vicarious baptism ‘on behalf of the dead’ would appear to have been pointless, unless it could have altered the fate of unevangelised dead. Trumbower also refers to a passage from Article 1257 of the new Catechism of the Catholic Church which quotes “Let the children come to me; do not hinder them.” (Mark 10:14; cf. 1 Timothy 2:4), and observes:

Indeed the great mercy of God who desires that all men should be saved, and Jesus’ tenderness toward children allow us to hope that there is a way of salvation for children who have died without baptism.⁶¹

There are, however, a number of New Testament texts which speak of ‘eternal’ punishment or destruction for the wicked (2 Thessalonians 1:9; Matthew 25:46). These verses suggest to some that there can be no conversion after death, but the final

⁶⁰ Trumbower, however, comments – “But 1 Corinthians 5:5 may also envision the possibility of a salvation, at the final judgment, when his spirit might be saved on the day of the Lord.” – op.cit., 35.

⁶¹ Trumbower, *ibid.*, 52, quoting from *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 320-1.

separation of the sheep from the goats presumably takes place at the great day of final judgment and not necessarily on the death of the individual.

Although New Testament scholarship is divided on the matter, and, although the Bible does not enable one to quote many proof-texts in favour of posthumous salvation, there would appear to be a firm foundation in scripture for the conclusions of this thesis. Sufficient biblical evidence has been provided in this opening chapter for the probable existence of an intermediate state of temporary duration, in which there would be ample opportunity for sanctification, and, in the case of the unevangelised, for conversion. The Gospel of Christ and his Cross testifies clearly to God's infinite mercy and loving-kindness towards the least, the last and the lost. Among contemporary theologians, this emphasis is strongly expressed in the theology of George Newlands for whom love "is the central characteristic of God in himself and in relation to the created order."⁶² This thesis will argue that a favourable destiny for the unevangelised can be deduced from the justice, love and mercy of God. Newlands also envisages an interactive relationship between God and his creatures in which, although God's presence is hidden – "Love's 'letting-be' in epistemic distance is also the love that will not let us go." As will become evident in later chapters below, it is this divine love which give space or freedom to God's creatures to respond to him in faith – one of the basic axioms also of opentheism. The discussion must now proceed in chapter 2 to consider the witness of early Christian traditions from the Patristic period.

⁶² Newlands George, *God in Christian Perspective*, (Edinburgh: T.& T. Clark, 1994), 40, 74.

CHAPTER 2

The Intermediate State in Patristic, Medieval and Reformation Periods

(a) The Patristic Period

It was important in Chapter 1, to investigate the scriptural basis for belief in an intermediate state during which the unevangelised might have that opportunity to encounter Christ which accidents of geography or history prevented them from having in this life. Varying interpretations of the biblical witness, however, mean that the developing understanding of the Early Church Fathers needs to be taken into account. Which of the biblical emphases do they underscore, and how do they regard posthumous conversion in an intermediate state? Whether there can be a positive destiny for the unevangelised remains an open question.

In the first section of this chapter, attention will focus on the beliefs of the Early Church Fathers, from about 100 to 600 A.D., concerning the fate of the dead between death and the final judgment. In the second century A.D., there was considerable speculation about the fate of those who had lived before Christ, or those who lived contemporaneously with Christ, and after him, who did not have a chance to hear the Christian message before their deaths. Christ died for all humanity, yet there were many who did not have the chance either to accept or reject the message, through the accidents of timing or location of birth. These questions and ideas inspired references to the subject in the ninth *Similitude of the Shepherd of Hermas*¹ in which 40 apostles and teachers preached to, and baptised the dead after their own deaths. Yet there is mention only of “those who had fallen asleep in righteousness and great purity”, and no indication of any chance of postmortem reformation of the wicked.

In the *Apocalypse of Peter*² and the *Sibylline Oracles*³ there is evidence of a tradition of the righteous wishing to save some of the damned, of their being granted their wish, and of the intercessory power of the holy ones to save “whomsoever they ask

¹ *Similitude*, IX, 16. 2-7

² *Apocalypse of Peter*. 14:1-4

³ *Sibylline Oracles* 2:330-8.

for.” This would happen at the Last Judgment, but the categories of pious and wicked would remain distinct.

The general view, however, from the Apologists onwards is that judgment on an individual’s life occurs at death rather than at the end of the world. This is a continuation of the belief expressed in Scripture, for example in the Parable of Dives and Lazarus (Luke 16: 19-31). It implies the concept of an intermediate state between death and resurrection – an idea which becomes more cogent with the continuing postponement of the parousia. In this interim period, the dead anticipate in some way, the fate which will be theirs, in its fullness, once history reaches its final consummation. Justin Martyr, for example, foresees some kind of provisional reward for the just, and punishment for sinners, after death. He rejects the Platonic notion that the soul is, with all its powers, immortal by nature. The human soul cannot be eternal like God. The biblical concept of Hades, a shadowy underworld of the dead, persists through the intertestamental period, and influences the thought of early Patristic writers such as Justin Martyr and Irenaeus. The Syriac tradition speaks of a “sleep of souls” in a kind of suspended animation between death and resurrection. Justin, however, does maintain that humans survive with sensation after death, with the souls of the righteous staying in a better place, and those of the wicked in a worse one.⁴ The location of the righteous and the wicked in the intermediate state is of no great relevance to this thesis, but Justin Martyr’s belief that there is provisional reward for the righteous and punishment for sinners after death coheres well with the contention of this thesis that the just enjoy satisfaction and peace in the presence of Christ, and the wicked may suffer the agonies of conscience which would be necessary before repentance and conversion.

Irenaeus of Lyons gives further details, envisaging that souls will be separated from bodies, and – “go away to the invisible place allotted to them by God,”⁵ where, as shades, they will retain the “form” of their body, and memory of their existence on earth, but not its fleshly substance.⁶ The temporary destination of the righteous, Irenaeus describes as “paradise” which “has been prepared for righteous men such as

⁴ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 5; *I Apology*, 18.20.

⁵ Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, 5.31.2.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.34.1-2.

have the spirit.”⁷ At the parousia they are reunited with their bodies and go into the presence of God. In this context, Irenaeus pictures prophets and righteous men of the Old Testament enjoying the presence of Christ in the millennium, but as chiliasm will not be researched as part of this project, it is mentioned only in passing.

Irenaeus conceives the fate of the ungodly as eternal separation from God, and not annihilation.⁸ He is anxious to make it clear that the wicked condemn themselves. It is important, therefore, to note that there is no sign of universalism in his thought, and that this is typical of orthodox writers of his time. There is no hint of the very different beliefs which theologians such as Origen and Gregory of Nyssa hold in the third and fourth centuries, A.D. The main purpose of judgment is to separate the righteous from the unrighteous, and that judgment is final.

The general ideas of Irenaeus are developed in greater detail by Tertullian. At the end of his *De Anima* (55-58), he pictures Hades as “an enormous subterranean space, hidden deep in the bowels of the earth,” which serves as a reception room (*hospitium*) for all the dead, the wicked and the righteous alike.⁹ The scriptural warrant for the existence of such a place is the Parable of Dives and Lazarus (Luke 16: 19-31), and Jesus’ Descent to Hell (1 Peter 3: 18-20; 4:6.) The souls confined there are unchanged in age and form from the time of death, and Tertullian, like Justin Martyr and Irenaeus before him, imagines that they anticipate there, their ultimate fate, either “gloom or glory.”¹⁰ In his view, there is an interval – the millennium between the first and second resurrections. All those who are not martyrs, both Christians and non-Christians go to temporary storage facilities to await the final judgment. The righteous go to the ‘bosom of Abraham’ and the wicked to a place of anticipatory punishment.¹¹ The soul in this intermediate state is capable of heroism or sin, because it possesses a genuine, if subtle and very limited, corporeality.¹² Hades is imagined by Tertullian, as divided into two regions, one for the good, and one for the wicked.¹³ The just are received into ‘Abraham’s bosom’, a temporary receptacle of faithful souls, where we find drawn,

⁷ Ibid., 5.5.1.

⁸ Ibid., 5.27.2.

⁹ Tertullian, *De Anima*, 55.

¹⁰ Ibid., 58.

¹¹ Ibid., 55.58 and *Ad Marcionem*, 4.34.

¹² Ibid., 7;

¹³ Ibid., 56.

even now, an image of the future.¹⁴ Sinners, on the other hand, begin, already in Hades, to suffer for their sins, especially the sins committed through the soul alone.¹⁵ In the opinion of Brian Daley, - "it was Tertullian who really laid the foundation for Latin Christendom's doctrine of the 'last things'"¹⁶.

It should be noted that there is not a word in Tertullian about a suffering of the imperfectly good. Those who suffer are those who will be condemned. There is no hint here of an anticipation of the later belief in purgatory. There is plenty of evidence in the time of Tertullian that prayers are offered in the Church for the dead, but these prayers are not intended to relieve penal suffering. 'Rest', 'sleep', 'a place of repose', 'a place and a mansion in God's kingdom', 'in green pastures', 'sanctification' - these are the things prayed for. It is implied that these are the things of which it is hoped that the Christian dead are already assured, and which they enjoy. It is also significant that Tertullian maintains that there is no sleep of the soul in the intermediate state. It is not a time of inaction, for the body is not indispensable to the sorrows and joys of the soul, and the torments of the lost begin directly after death. An exception is made by Tertullian for the martyrs, who have the special and unique privilege of entering at death into paradise; but their paradise he identifies with the place beneath the altar where St John saw them in the Apocalypse. (Revelation 6:9).

The types of eschatology which have been examined so far have been broadly dualistic - those of second century theologians who say that the just will live in eternal bliss and the unjust in eternal damnation. The delay in the arrival of the parousia, however, has another consequence, additional to the encouragement of an intermediate state. As believers in the Early Church began to realise that the coming of the parousia was going to be delayed, the feeling of tension caused by impending crisis was relaxed. G.W.H. Lampe notes that where before, thoughts had been concentrated on what would happen in the last days, now there came to be a new emphasis on mysticism or pneumatology.¹⁷ One of the theologians thinking along these lines was Origen. He believed in the Holy Spirit indwelling the soul of the saved person. A 'spiritualising'

¹⁴ Tertullian, *Ad Marcionem*, 4.34..

¹⁵ Tertullian, *De Anima*, 58.

¹⁶ Daley, Brian, *The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 37.

of the soul takes place, as it progresses towards union with God. There are various degrees or stages in the soul's ascent to communion with the divine – an idea which was to occur again much later in modern theology in the thought of John Hick. The emphasis, here, is on gradual spiritual development rather than on what Lampe describes as a “catastrophic divine act in the culmination of the historic process.” With this new emphasis dominant, typical eschatological ideas such as the prospect of the parousia, the resurrection of the body, the judgment and the renewal of creation are regarded increasingly as superfluous. Gradual spiritual growth in the afterlife is preferred in this thesis to instant perfection at death, otherwise the continuing identity of the person before and after death is imperilled.

As eschatology develops, then, in the Alexandrian School of the third and fourth centuries, there is a significant departure from the dualist theology which prevailed in the preceding century – a development which promises to look much more favourably on the ultimate conclusions of this thesis regarding eschatological evangelisation. Clement of Alexandria shrinks from the thought that the eternal fate of human beings is irrevocably sealed at the grave; and hence his belief that opportunities for repentance will continue in the life to come. He believes in a ‘heavenly’ intermediate state of the soul. The body is inferior to the soul, and the latter being less susceptible to vice, will find its improvement capabilities enhanced through separation from the body.¹⁸ He is also sympathetic to Gnostics’ and Neoplatonists’ intellectualist and speculative concerns, especially to their emphasis on the role of knowledge and learning in believers’ attempts to perfect themselves.¹⁹ Most influential is his doctrine of punishment, which he sees as medicinal and educative, as vindictive punishment he regards as being alien to God’s perfectly good nature. Since it is medicinal, at least some of the punishment after death is temporary.²⁰

¹⁷ Lampe, G.W.H., “Early Patristic Theology” in “Eschatology” in *Scottish Journal of Theology*, Occasional Paper 2, (1953), 19-20.

¹⁸ Hill, Charles, *Regnum Caelorum*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 121.

¹⁹ Daley, op.cit., 44.

²⁰ According to Daley, this had two important consequences – “(1) Clement asserted that sins committed by believers would be cleansed in this way, thus becoming the first Christian writer to assert categorically, that even the just would endure punishment after death, albeit of a purgatorial kind. (2) He suggested that the punishment might be enough to purify or turn believers to God after death. It is unclear whether he thought that this would in fact lead to universal salvation, although his thought

Origen develops Clement's eschatology in the direction of universalism. He believes that when an individual dies, his earthly body will be transformed into a spiritual body, and the whole person will be judged and punished immediately.²¹ He holds that all must come to the refiner's furnace, basing this opinion on 1 Corinthians 3:13. No later Greek Father reaffirms this doctrine that even the most perfect Christians must undergo a fiery purgation hereafter. The doctrine of a hell that is remedial and temporary is later taken up by Gregory of Nyssa. The thesis finds here justification for its view that every human being passes through the intermediate state for purgation. The experience would literally be hell for the wicked as long as they remain unrepentant, but this need not be a permanent state.

The kingdom of God, in Origen's eyes, consists of a gradual accumulation of those individuals who have been purified in this life, and through medicinal punishment after their death²². A phrase which Origen often repeats is 'the end is always like the beginning'²³. He likes to speak on a cosmic scale of the restoration of the whole human race to its original state.²⁴ The soul retains the form (or *eidos*) of the body, which is more than just the body's appearance, but seems to be the bearer of the body's essential characteristics. From the *eidos*, the spiritual body is built up.²⁵ From this, it is obvious that Origen does not believe the soul to be entirely disembodied, for more than once, he states that only God is utterly incorporeal.²⁶

Origen clearly follows Clement in regarding punishment as medicinal, and not retributive, as in Augustine. Yet it is a form of very unpleasant and bitter medicine, ensuring that over time the soul will be gradually purified, and so restored to its original rank. Here, Origen bases his views on 1 Corinthians 15:28, believing that all things will finally be 'restored' through God's goodness, through their subjection to Christ, and through their unity with the Holy Spirit – to the end which is like the beginning. For this interpretation to be in keeping with scripture, he takes *aionios* to

tends in that direction. It is also unclear whether the purgatorial punishment constrains sinners to repent against their will, or works in harmony with human freedom." (Daley, *ibid.*, 47).

²¹ Origen, *De Principiis*, 3. 6. 4-6, Preface 5.

²² Daley, *op.cit.*, 49.

²³ Origen, *op.cit.*, 1.6.2., cf. 2.1.3.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.6.3.

²⁵ See Ludlow, Morwenna, *Universal Salvation*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 33.

²⁶ Origen, *op.cit.*, 2.2.1., cf. 3.6.1., Preface 9.

mean 'lasting for an age', rather than 'lasting for ever'. Also, the submission of God's enemies in 1 Corinthians 15:28 is understood to mean that they will repent, not that they will be annihilated.²⁷

While a soul is undergoing the process of purification, it is also a time of instruction. He sees the process largely in intellectualist terms, and even speaks of a 'school of souls' after death²⁸. Origen gives two opinions on where this might occur; in the first, the saints will dwell in the air between heaven and earth; in the second, they will dwell in a special place on earth, identified with the earthly paradise. (Genesis 2:8). In both places, they do the same thing; they gain full knowledge of the things they have seen, and the reasons why things are so. In the 'school of souls', the well-trained and alert soul will quickly pass from there into the air, and from the air into the heavens. The heavens have many stages through which the soul passes. (John 14:2). The presence of Christ pervades everywhere, since he is not confined to his corporeal body. When the soul attains the perfection of this knowledge, it is led by Christ to contemplate the Father 'face to face'. (I Corinthians 13:12).²⁹ It is interesting to note Origen's theory of successive steps in the soul's ascent, which, according to his exegesis of the Pentateuch, are prefigured in the successive stages of the wilderness wanderings.

Gregory of Nazianzus, in his panegyric on his brother Caesarius, reflects on the intermediate state, believing that, at death, when freed from the limitations of its physical body, every good soul "immediately begins to sense and perceive the blessings that await it."³⁰ He sometimes speaks of an eternal and avenging fire, but also that punishment after death is medicinal. He implies that God will finally consume evil, and that the goal of the universe is the union of all creatures with God.

Gregory of Nyssa is probably the theologian most influenced by Origen, for example, in his concept of *apokatastasis*, the restoration of humanity to an original state of perfection, unity with God in contemplative beatitude.³¹ He clearly shares Origen's

²⁷ Ibid., 3,6.5.

²⁸ Ibid., 2.11.6.

²⁹ See Hennessey, Lawrence R., "The Place of Saints and Sinners after Death", in *Origen of Alexandria*, eds., Charles Kannengiesser and William L. Petersen. (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 304.

³⁰ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio*, 7.21.

³¹ Gregory of Nyssa, *De Hominis Opificio*, 30.

hope for universal salvation. Although a few passages in his works allude to the exclusion of sinners from God's city,³² Gregory makes it plain in many other places that he believes God's plan will be ultimately realised in every creature. The restoration to unity will touch "those now lying in sin,"³³ and will include even those previously condemned to hell.³⁴

Again, as in Clement and Origen, Gregory maintains that in order to participate in the eternal movement of endlessly knowing and loving God, every human being needs to be purified in both these capacities. If such purgation (e.g. by purgative fire), is not realised before death, it must take place after the resurrection. Gregory nowhere asserts that sinners will be punished eternally. Such punishment could only be vindictive, and God punishes only to separate the good from evil, and to draw it into the communion of blessedness.³⁵ The universalist conclusions of Origen and Gregory as a matter of dogmatic certainty are unacceptable because of scripture's witness to a 'double outcome' of salvation for some, and condemnation for others.

No account of Patristic theology would be complete without mention of Augustine of Hippo, because of the powerful influence he had upon all the Latin theology which was to follow in the medieval period and beyond. The key to understanding his eschatological hope is 'the sharp metaphysically grounded distinction he draws between time and eternity'³⁶. Time, for Augustine, is a created entity which will finish on the last day – the 'place' in which we dwell, the place of change and corruption. Eternity is the place where God dwells, the place of changelessness and incorruption. Augustine defers the fate of believers until the End. He believes that the souls of the dead are immediately judged at the end of their lives, and that they enter the place of reward or punishment, without their bodies, although they may receive a sort of likeness, a phantasm of their resurrection bodies. The prayers of the Church for the forgiveness of sins, and even a purgative effect of temporal punishment, if it turns the heart of the sinner away from himself to God, may release the souls of some from

³² Gregory of Nyssa, *Homilia in Psal.* 2.16.

³³ Gregory of Nyssa, *Oratio Catechetica*, 26.

³⁴ Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses*, 2.82.

³⁵ Daley, *op.cit.*, 89.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 131.

condemnation to salvation before the general resurrection.³⁷ Yet Augustine is contemptuous of attempts to see all punishment as purgative and therefore temporary, and he devotes chapter 21 (17-21) in the *City of God* to repudiating the idea. He sees all punishment as retributive in itself, but with the possibility of it occasionally having a purgative side-effect.³⁸

The question as to whether Augustine subscribes to a doctrine of purgatory has been much debated, particularly with reference to 1 Corinthians 3:16. Thiselton maintains that Augustine does envisage the possibility that to be saved 'through fire' may be something close to a doctrine of purgatory, considering a kind of 'worldliness that is venial' which may then be consumed in flames. Of such a fire of tribulation 'here or hereafter' he comments – "this I do not contradict because possibly it is true."³⁹ Thiselton detects some ambiguity in the *City of God* 21:13, but says that the passing allusion to prayers for the dead in 21:24 is more telling in favour of Augustine's own belief in purgatory.⁴⁰

Augustine clearly rejects universal salvation. In his reply to Orosius, he invokes Matthew 25:46 – "And so (the wicked) will go into eternal burning, and the just into eternal life."⁴¹ In the same passage he sees another danger in allowing for universal posthumous salvation. This would mean, in his opinion, that as there would be an end to the punishment of the wicked, this would cast aspersions upon the reward of the just. There might also be, in that case, the possibility that even the just would relapse into the uncleanness of sin and death.⁴² The mere mention of such a possibility is anathema to Augustine, but this thesis holds to the possibility of postmortem apostasy, because it claims that humans retain libertarian freewill beyond death. There would be little value in spiritual progress, if there were to be no options and no chance of regressing. There can be no doubt for Augustine about the eternity of punishment for

³⁷ "Not all who undergo temporal punishment after death will come to everlasting punishments which will take place after the final judgment. For, some will be forgiven in the age still ahead, for what has been forgiven in this age, so that they will not be subjected to eternal punishments of the coming age." (Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 21:13.)

³⁸ Doyle, Robert C., *Eschatology and the Shape of Christian Belief*, (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1999), 92.

³⁹ Augustine, *op.cit.*, 21:26.

⁴⁰ Thiselton, Anthony C., *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2000), 332

⁴¹ Augustine, *Ad Orosium*, 5.7.

⁴² *ibid.*

the wicked and the unbaptised. The perpetual death of the damned, that is their alienation from the life of God, will abide without end, and it will be the common punishment of them all, whatever conjectures rising from human emotions, men may make about the variety of punishments and the relief or intermission of their woes.

Many of the leading theologians of the Early Church opposed posthumous salvation, opting instead for a dualistic eschatology. They included 2 Clement, Hippolytus, Tertullian, Cyprian, John Chrysostom, the later Jerome, Augustine and Gregory the Great. Jeffrey Trumbower identifies one conviction which they all had in common, namely, that if God were to forgive non-Christians after death, and if it were possible for non-Christian to repent after death, then there would be no pressure upon them to amend their ways in this life. Such a view would threaten the authority of the Church, as it "would not be the sole focus of salvation, and moral seriousness might go into decline."⁴³

A number of objections could be advanced to this line of thinking. Postmortem reward or punishment ('pie in the sky when you die') should never be envisaged as supplying prudential motives for virtuous living before death. Moral seriousness in this life should be the fruit of faith, thus avoiding justification by works. The commitment of faith arises in grateful response to God's redemptive love in Christ, and is unworthy if it is made as a kind of self-centred insurance for admission eternal life. Also, submission to Christ in this life brings the believer a joy and satisfaction which is quite independent of any hope of eternal reward, or fear of eternal punishment. Conversion to Christ, and the life which it brings could be offered to non-Christians with far more honourable and immediate inducements, and the authority of the Church remain unimpaired.

It will be obvious from the foregoing that the eschatology of Clement of Alexandria, Origen and Gregory of Nyssa is a much more favourable arena for identifying the possibility of posthumous salvation than a dualistic eschatology. Posthumous salvation for sinful Christians does develop in different ways in the West and in the East –

⁴³ Trumbower, *op.cit.*, 155.

purgatory in the West; prayers now for mercy at the final judgment in the East. To these matters attention will now turn in the following section of this chapter.

(b) The Medieval Period

Eschatology in the Middle Ages follows on naturally from the time of Augustine with the belief that there is an intermediate state between death and resurrection when human souls enjoy rest or suffer affliction while awaiting, either the completion of their salvation, or the consummation of their damnation.⁴⁴ The transition from the Patristics to the early Middle Ages is marked in particular by Gregory the Great, in Book IV of the *Dialogues* – a pastoral, rather than a theological work, which speaks in terms of visions and wonders. It is clear from visions, that, at death, the soul is thought to pass to an incorporeal existence.⁴⁵ The perfect go straight to heaven. Despite their disembodied state, souls know and consort with each other. The dead are occasionally revived, either to warn others, or to be given a second chance. It is clear that Gregory believes that the soul's postmortem existence is related to the quality of its life here in this world. The soul must therefore endure a period of purgation after death. As he holds that this existence of the soul will be more active than that envisaged in the biblical and Greek traditions, he thinks that it will be necessary to move the cleansing fire from the Last Day to the day of death.⁴⁶ Yet it is not at all clear that Gregory intends to teach that the soul actively and literally undergoes punishment immediately upon the death of the body, and there is no developed doctrine of purgatory in his writings. Finally, hell is described as an eternal death for the souls of the wicked.

When we move from the sixth to the late tenth century, Aelfric of Eynsham can be taken as a typical theologian of the period. Like Gregory, Aelfric teaches that in the intermediate state there is an active existence for the soul in which it suffers eternal or temporary punishment, or enjoys eternal bliss until the fullness of time. The soul has the likeness of the body in all its members, and can therefore experience comfort or pain according to the merits of its life in the body. Those who can be saved but need

⁴⁴ Augustine, *op.cit.*, 109.

⁴⁵ Gregory the Great, *Dialogues IV*, chaps, 6-25.

purgation, suffer as long as is necessary. The saints, on the other hand, dwell in heaven, interceding for the living and those undergoing purgation. Again, however, as in Gregory, the doctrines relating to purgatory for this period, remain peripheral and unarticulated⁴⁷.

Peter Abelard (1079-1142) is another prominent medieval theologian. One of the main points of interest for this thesis in his theology concerns the fate of unbaptised children. Abelard finds himself unable to follow the hard-line beliefs of Augustine, which held sway until his time. Sin, in the sense of guilt cannot be passed on from parents to children, since newborn children, lacking reason, and so freewill, cannot incur guilt. How can God be just in damning them, as Augustine believes he does, if, as Abelard holds, they have not inherited the guilt of Adam's sin? He asks, whether among humans, we would not consider it as a very great evil, if an innocent son was consigned to "transitory earthly flames, not to speak of eternal ones" because of his father's sin.⁴⁸ Abelard answers, by claiming in principle, that whatever God decides, is for the best, even if we cannot understand why; but, in any case, it is possible to show how the damnation of unbaptised children is for their good. Their damnation, Abelard suggests, merely consists in deprivation of the beatific vision; and, he claims, God allows to die unbaptised, those who, he has foreseen, would have been very wicked, had they lived and merited severer punishments.⁴⁹

Abelard's position on the salvation of good pagans who lived before Christ, is also of interest. With Anselm of Laon and William of Champeaux he argues that, just as baptism is the remedy for original sin under the New Law, so the Old Law has its remedy – circumcision, (though enjoined only on Jewish males), and so does natural law with its gifts and sacrifices. Pagan lack of faith presents a more serious obstacle, but Abelard believes that many good pagans who lived before the coming of Christ are saved. Faith in the incarnation was available to the ancients to follow if they chose,

⁴⁶ Ibid., IV.41. – "There must be a cleansing fire, because of some minor faults that remain to be purged away."

⁴⁷ Gatch, Milton Mc.C., *Eschatology and Christian Nurture*, (Aldershot: Ashgate/Variorum, 2000), 115-9.

⁴⁸ Abelard, P., *Commentary on Romans*, 168: 486-8.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 169:536-170:554, quoted in Marenbon, J., *The Philosophy of Peter Abelard*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 325.

through prophecies which were the result of supernatural revelation. Also, he believes that God does not deny grace to those who live as well as they can by natural law.⁵⁰

The outstanding theologian of the high Middle Ages is Thomas Aquinas. Since his views are so influential, they require more extended treatment. Aquinas follows Aristotle in holding that the soul “is the form of the body”, and that “it is...contrary to the nature of the soul to be without a body.”⁵¹ Therefore, after death, since the soul is the form which determines the matter of the body, it carries, in the intermediate state, a natural orientation towards forming a body. In this state, however, it is imperfect, and it is therefore impossible for the soul to be perfectly happy. It cannot fulfil all its potentialities, and thus, in a sense, longs for the resurrection, when body and soul will be reunited.⁵² Also, punishment, like ultimate reward, demands reunion of soul and body.⁵³ He believes that there is no reason, in the case of the infliction of punishment, or the bestowal of reward, why souls should wait for the resumption of their bodies.⁵⁴ This is because the soul, in its operation of the will, directs the body in acts of sin or love, and not the body the soul. Even before the resurrection of their bodies, the souls of the pious can enjoy God on a par with the spiritual angels who enjoy the vision of him in heaven.⁵⁵ If it be asked how souls awaiting their bodies can suffer punishment when such punishment is described in the Bible in terms of bodily torment by fire, Aquinas argues that such descriptions contain metaphorical elements pointing to torture by remorse of conscience.⁵⁶ Purgation is necessary because a soul which ultimately is going to be rewarded must be ‘entirely purified.’⁵⁷ This involves there being a double judgment – an individual one at death, and a general judgment at the end. The apocalypse would then only be the ratification of the judgment of the soul at the hour of death – which would appear to detract from its value and critical function. These views obviously imply an increased importance of purgatory. Those who have not been purged while living, must not be consigned to eternal punishment, but must, in their disembodied state, be allowed to complete their satisfaction. It is noteworthy,

⁵⁰ Abelard, P., *ibid.*, 200, 446-50.

⁵¹ Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, IV, 79.10.

⁵² *Ibid.*, IV, 79.11.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, IV, 79.12.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, IV, 91.4.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, IV, 91.8-9.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, IV, 90.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, IV, 91.6.

however, that Aquinas holds out no hope of postmortem repentance. He maintains that when the soul separates from the body at death, no further changes can take place in a person's will, either from good to evil, or from evil to good.⁵⁸

Aquinas's position on unbaptised children is that he regards them as ineligible to admittance to heaven, and, to accommodate them, he promotes the hypothesis of *limbo*, a term which is derived from the Latin *limbus*, meaning 'fringe', denoting the fringe of hell.

The topic of eschatological evangelisation is addressed from time to time by theologians in the medieval Church. Sanders, however, identifies two factors which hinder them from reaching a clear solution to the problem, as follows:

1. They are simply unaware of how many unevangelised there actually are. Aquinas thinks that there are only a handful of such people. The magnitude of the problem only becomes evident after the great explorations and discoveries of new lands in the 15th and 17th centuries.
2. When the question of salvation outside the Church is brought up, it is typically directed to heretics and schismatics rather than the unevangelised.⁵⁹

The position of pre-Christian pagans is not considered to the same extent.

Aquinas, at least in his earlier writings, believes that nearly everyone has had an adequate opportunity to hear the Christian message. Ignorance of the basic elements of Christian faith would be rare indeed. Medieval Christians know that besides Christians there are also Jews and Moslems, but these people have heard enough about Christ not to have the excuse of invincible ignorance. To be completely ignorant of the gospel, a person would need to be totally isolated from the civilised world, as in the case of a child who had been "brought up in the forest or among wild beasts."

From this, it seems obvious that the destiny of the unevangelised is a much more pressing problem in the 21st century than in the 13th. In the later Middle Ages, as they become more aware of the extent of peoples further afield who have not heard the

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, IV, 92.1.

⁵⁹ Sanders, John, *No Other Name*, (London: SPCK., 1994), 19.

gospel, greater attention comes to be paid to the question – What about the fate of those who remain outside the sphere of human preaching? Will they be damned without hearing about Christ? The guiding principle is that no-one is damned without an opportunity for salvation. Aquinas is quite clear that God will send the message of the gospel to them. His position is that everyone since the time of the incarnation must believe the general articles of the Faith, the trinity, the incarnation and the resurrection.

Referring to the handful of people who, he believes, remain to be evangelised, those ‘brought up in the forest or among wild beasts,’⁶⁰ for such people, he believes that God in his providence will give them what is necessary for salvation. This would happen, either through interior illumination for someone who used his natural reason in choosing good and avoiding evil, or, by the sending of a preacher, as Peter was sent to Cornelius. (Acts 10:20). If Aquinas is right in this contention, then it could be argued that postmortem evangelism would not be necessary. This thesis, however, will argue that even if a person chooses good rather than evil by the use of natural reason, this in itself would not be sufficient for salvation. Also, Aquinas’s other alternative is unacceptable, because the failure of preachers to reach the unevangelised would be due, not to shortcomings in God’s providence, but because, in receiving the gift of freewill from God, the Church on earth simply failed to undertake its mission effectively.

There is speculation that Aquinas in his later work, the *Summa Theologiae* is no longer confident that God would send a preacher, to make sure that a person who was “doing what lay in his power” would not lack the possibility of coming to explicit faith in Christ. Sullivan quotes J.de Guibert, and suggests that as he grew older Aquinas came to realise that it wasn’t only the rare “child brought up in the wilderness” but whole nations who had never had the gospel preached to them. Sullivan believes that Aquinas then fell back upon Augustine’s belief that they were ignorant of the gospel because God was punishing them for their sin, at least original sin.⁶¹ Sullivan goes on to mention other indications that Aquinas may have come to know that it might not have been so rare that only a handful could not have known Christ. He notes that in the

⁶⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, q.14,a.11..

13th century, Franciscan and Dominican missionaries had penetrated quite far into Asia, and that Marco Polo had come back from China. Sullivan's conclusion is that when Aquinas spoke of people who had never heard of Christ, he was thinking of isolated individuals rather than of whole nations, because the "renown" of the gospel had spread to all nations in his day, but it had not reached every individual.

On Sanders's second point regarding heretics and schismatics, Aquinas holds that the only kind of unbelief that would not be culpable is that of a person who had heard nothing about the faith. He explains:

Unbelief may be taken in two ways: first, by way of pure negation, so that a man may be called an unbeliever, merely because he does not have faith. Secondly, unbelief may be taken by way of opposition to the faith, in which sense a person refuses to hear the faith or despises it. It is this that completes the notion of unbelief, and it is in this sense that unbelief is a sin.⁶²

People in the first category would not be damned for lack of faith, but for personal sins which "cannot be taken away without faith." The *Summa* fails to come up with the solution found in his earlier work, that to such individuals God would provide the means by which they could arrive at an act of saving faith.

A third factor which Sanders could have mentioned as a hindrance to medieval theologians is that they had no idea of the age of the world. Modern science has revealed the fact that there have been humans on the planet for many millennia before the biblical era. The numbers in this category must run into billions for whom there had been no opportunity to hear the gospel of salvation. This is a fact which could never have occurred to Aquinas and other medieval theologians.

Aquinas believes that every human being is condemned because of both original sin and (if they live long enough), actual sin⁶³. For adults to achieve salvation from this condemnation, an 'act of faith' is necessary⁶⁴. As this is a central concern for the main theme of this thesis, careful scrutiny must be given to what he means by an 'act of

⁶¹ Sullivan, F.A., *Salvation Outside the Church?* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), 54.

⁶² Aquinas, *op.cit.*, II, q.10.a1.

⁶³ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III, q.52,a.5.

faith'. Aquinas follows Augustine in believing that the faith required for salvation has always in some sense, been faith, not only in God, but also in Christ, as the one mediator of salvation. He comes, however, to recognise that faith in the one mediator could be implied in that faith in God which is described in Hebrews 11:6 – “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists, and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”

Who would qualify as having this faith? Aquinas makes a sharp distinction between clergy and laity in this regard, allowing lay believers a greater margin of error in the doctrines they are required to believe for salvation. He also classes Gentiles who lived before the Christian era in the same category as the laity. All that would be required of them would be a vague knowledge of God's desire to save them.⁶⁵ There are, however, much stricter guidelines for lay people living after the incarnation. They have to believe in Jesus Christ and the Trinity in order to be saved, but they do not require to have such a clear and accurate understanding of the doctrines as the clergy.⁶⁶

Aquinas holds strongly to the universal salvific will of God. It is because it is God's desire to save everyone that, in his providence, he makes available to each person the essential prerequisite for salvation, except in those cases where the person himself provides the obstacle. While holding that God desires all to be saved, Aquinas, however does not believe that all will be saved. Nor does he hold out any hope of an opportunity for repentance after death. He specifically asserts that when Christ descended into hell, he did not effect the release of any souls there.

The Middle Ages witnesses a steady development of the concept of purgatory. The idea which has been foreshadowed in the writings of Clement of Alexandria and Augustine becomes popular through the *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great (c.540-604). He says that a purging fire will cleanse the soul from minor faults (venial sins) before judgment, and that the prayers of others and the sacrifice of the mass can free a soul from purgatory and prepare it for heaven.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, q.68,a.1.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, II, 2,q.2,a.7.

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, II, 2,q.2,aa.3-8.

Aquinas produces the classic formulation of purgatory. He says that, in purgatory, suffering takes place for unforgiven guilt for light or venial sins.⁶⁸ This suffering – more painful than the greatest pain in this life – and caused by actual fire, varies with the measure of guilt. The pain is accepted voluntarily, the sinner knowing it is the last stage of preparation for heaven. He admits, however, that neither the Bible nor reason enables us to locate purgatory. It is noteworthy that the doctrine implies that there will be, for the individual, a ‘particular judgment’ at death when he or she is confronted by the whole truth of the life they have lived, and are made ‘their own judge.’ If they die in faith in Christ, their sins, indeed, are forgiven, but they are not yet purged of their sins. They have not yet expiated them, by suffering the necessary temporal punishments. The goal is the perfecting of the person in accordance with God’s plan and purpose. In later centuries, the fire is generally considered to be a metaphorical description of a spiritual experience. Moltmann refers to it as the light and fire of God’s eternal love experienced by the believing soul after death. It burns away the sins which separate the soul from God, and draws the soul to God.⁶⁹ It comes to be regarded, not as pain inflicted externally, but rather the intrinsic pain which arises when the ego-centred self is surrendered so that the God-centred self of love may take its place.

While the doctrine of purgatory enriches the notion of personal responsibility, it does not lead to any idea of a second chance being given after death, to put right what has been rejected or destroyed in this life. The decisions we make in this life are regarded as having eternal consequences, and the idea of purgatory is strictly for people with unfinished penance.

Possibly the biggest influence on the popular mind of ideas relating to purgatory comes, not through the work of a theologian, but through the poetry of a layman – Dante Alighieri.⁷⁰ In the *Divine Comedy*, Dante borrows imagery from the descent of Aeneas to the underworld, in Vergil’s *Aeneid*. He pictures purgatory as lying on a mountain of purification with seven stages, a mountain that reaches from earth to heaven. In *The Inferno* there is a vivid account of the outermost circle of hell, where

⁶⁷ Gregory the Great, op.cit., IV, 40-41,60.

⁶⁸ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, IIIa, q.69,a.2.

⁶⁹ Moltmann, J., *The Coming of God*, (London: SCM., 1995), 97.

there is ‘untormented sadness’ – that is to say, no bliss, but no torment either. Here, there is to be found *limbo*. There is supposed to be a *limbus infantium*, for infants, and a *limbus patrum* for Old Testament patriarchs. In the *Divine Comedy*, Dante even proposes a limbo for such greats as Socrates, Plato and Vergil. The theory is that while children may be innocent of personal sin, they are still in a state of original sin, so they remain in limbo for eternity. Augustine had held that unbaptised children only suffer some mild degree of punishment compared to adults. In any case, he argued, such punishment is better than complete annihilation. Dante asks his guide through hell if any have ever left hell for paradise. He is told that when Jesus descended into hell, he removed the saints from Old Testament times, such as Adam, Abel, Abraham and David. They were delivered because they believed the special revelation about the Messiah. In *The Paradiso*, Dante directly addresses the question of God’s justice in relation to the unevangelised:

A man is born in sight of Indus water, and none there to speak of Christ, and none to read or write. He died unbaptised and cannot receive the saving faith. What justice is it damns him? Is it his fault that he does not believe?

Dante’s guide responds:

To this high empery, none ever rose but through belief in Christ, either before or after his agony.

Dante, therefore, holds that explicit knowledge of Christ is necessary for the salvation of those who have lived both before and after the incarnation. Yet this principle does not mean that all the unevangelised are damned, for in Canto 20, he places some noble pagans in heaven. Dante concludes his discussion of salvation for the unevangelised by saying:

Mortals, be slow to judge! Not even we who look on God in heaven know, as yet, how many he will choose for ecstasy.

The Council of Florence in 1439 made purgatory the official doctrine of the Church. The Western Church came to the belief that hell and purgatory are not identical, and

⁷⁰ The references to Dante’s works are taken from Sanders, J., *No Other Name*, op.cit., 160-2.

thus they differed from the Eastern Church on two points – namely, that purgatory is a place distinct from hell, and that the souls are punished therein by corporeal fire. The Greeks held to the view that fire must be understood as a figure of speech in the intermediate state, since the immaterial soul could not suffer from material fire – that the suffering is spiritual is an idea, much more congenial to modern minds.

It is worth commenting on the fact that the developed medieval doctrine of purgatory in the Church of Rome, differed considerably from the teaching, for example, of Origen. Origen had held that the soul, after death, remains free to choose good or evil, and so, even after this life, may fall again, as well as rise. This differs markedly from the official Church view in, say Aquinas, and later in the Councils of Florence and Trent, that a persons' fate is decided at death; that purgatory does not offer fresh opportunities of repentance; and that it purifies only those who repented and believed during their earthly life. The position maintained at Florence, for example, was, that if the faults which deprive the soul of sanctifying grace in this life are not wiped out then, it is useless to expect them to be wiped out beyond the grave. The arguments of the Council, therefore, renounce the hypothesis of postmortem conversion or evangelisation. The Council of Trent also reaffirmed the practice of praying for the dead, following on from Aquinas' belief that Christ' descent into hell set us the example of love, to come to the assistance of our friends in purgatory. As already indicated, this thesis follows Origen rather than Aquinas in its concept of purgatory.

(c) The Reformation Period

The Reformation begins with a dispute over the practice of indulgences. They had been introduced in the 11th and 12th centuries, and soon they come to be applied to the punishment in purgatory. The Reformers and the Protestant Churches reject the idea of purgatory as a place or state where the living can influence the fate of the departed, and where the dead can make up deficiencies in their earthly lives. John Calvin, for example, describing the abuses and futility of purgatory, calls the idea of purgatory a revelation of Satan which can only be sustained through ignorant distortions of some scriptural passages.⁷¹ 1 Corinthians 3: 13-15 says that on 'the Day', a fire will test the

⁷¹ Calvin, J., *Institutes*, 3,5.6..

work of each person, but there is no hint, in the text, of fire purifying a person. 2 Timothy 1:18 asks for “mercy from the Lord on that day” for Onesiphorus. Those who use this verse as evidence of purgatory assume that Onesiphorus is dead, and that this is a prayer for the dead. But the Reformers regard this as an unwarranted assumption and a forced interpretation of the text. 2 Maccabees 12: 44-45, from the apocrypha, is also quoted as giving scriptural support for the doctrine of purgatory, as Judas is said to offer sacrifices and to pray for the dead to be freed from their sin, but Protestants disregard this passage as it lies outside their canon of Scripture.⁷²

In the 95 theses of 1517, which Luther pinned to the door of the Church in Wittenberg, he reacts strongly against the abuse of indulgences, yet still affirms – “I am most certain that there is a purgatory”⁷³. Yet, due to the lack of a scriptural basis, and the misuses connected with purgatory, he becomes more and more sceptical about its reality, and in 1530, writes his *Rejection of Purgatory*. In his *Schmalkaldic Articles* of 1537, he describes purgatory as an illusion of the devil, and to be discarded as error and idolatry.

In addition to rejecting purgatory because of its lack of scriptural support, the Reformers also regard it as undermining the central Reformation doctrine of justification by faith. Luther, for example, holds that the sinner knows himself to be justified by an eschatological act of pure grace, which anticipates Christ’s ultimate vindication of the sinner at the final judgment. The believer possesses a righteousness which is real, though not yet fully realised. Since righteousness is primarily to be thought of as *imputed*, it begs for a later eschatological realisation or ‘impartation’ at the apocalyptic end of the world.⁷⁴ It is the element of satisfaction in medieval theory which most distresses Calvin, for it is Christ who is the propitiation for the sins of the world. In his view, there is no other source of satisfaction or purgation beyond the blood of Christ, and he describes purgatory as “a dreadful blasphemy against Christ.”

⁷² Luther comments on 2 *Maccabees* as follows: “As far as the book of Maccabees is concerned, since it is not in the canon, it is of course convincing to believers, but powerless against the stiff-necked.” – Luther, WA 59,527 2936 – 528 2939.

⁷³ Luther, M., *Resolutions on the Disputation about the Virtue of Indulgences*, in WA (Weimar Ausgabe), I, 555,36.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, WA, IV, 364.

That is to say, if Christ has made full expiation for our sins on Calvary, there is no postmortem call for us to make further satisfaction, which would in any case smack of righteousness of works which is anathema to the Reformers.

The rejection of the Roman Catholic concept of purgatory poses a lasting problem for Protestant theologians. If the soul is not purified of earthly sins, what happens to it, and where does it go after death? Also, what happens to the souls between the time of death and the Last Judgment? During the 16th century there are two basic Protestant schools of thought, attempting to answer these questions.

Firstly, for some Lutherans and for the Anabaptists, the soul ‘sleeps’ – free from pain, but also free from consciousness. Luther inherits the medieval tradition of dualism, that at death the soul is separated from the body, though on this point, he entertains some doubt. In *The Promotion Disputation of Petrus Hegemon* in 1545, he says that “in death the spirit returns to the Lord”. He believes that “the soul is separated from the body”, but that does not necessarily mean that “the body and soul are separate things.” Luther’s view is that the soul of the deceased sleeps ‘between heaven and earth’, and is then reawakened on the last day.⁷⁵ What he means is that those who one day waken, will have no idea at all as to how long they slept or where they were.⁷⁶ Luther can describe the death of a Christian as a sleep, because he is freed from the wrath of God. “Death is become my slumber,” is the way in which he puts it in his hymn paraphrase of Simeon’s song (Luke 2: 29-32).⁷⁷ A Christian then goes into death calmly and peacefully, as though he were going to sleep and were not really dying. A godless man, however, feels death and is eternally terrified by it.⁷⁸ Luther makes certain exceptions to the rule that the dead sleep. God can also, he says, awaken them for a time – just as he allows those of us here upon earth to alternate between waking and sleeping. In commenting upon the Parable of Dives and Lazarus (Luke 16: 19-31), he infers that God may temporarily waken the dead from sleep, but adds that – “no certain rule may be set up about this.”⁷⁹ Also, in his lectures on Genesis, he compares

⁷⁵ Luther, WA, II, 449, 27-44.

⁷⁶ In Luther’s words – “So also death is called ‘sleep’ in Scripture. For just as one who does not know how it is that he sleeps and comes to morning unawares when he wakes, so we who suddenly arise in the Last Day will not know how we died and came through death.” – WA, 17, II, 235, 16-20.

⁷⁷ Luther, WA, 35 II, 439.

⁷⁸ Luther, WA, 17, II, 234.

⁷⁹ Luther, WA, III, 194, 10-21.

our sleep at night with the sleep of the soul at death. On earth, our body sleeps, and our soul is awake, and thus has visions and hears conversations between God and the angels. The same could apply to the soul asleep in death.⁸⁰ There is, however, a certain ambivalence about Luther's views, because elsewhere he talks about fellowship with Christ immediately after death, perhaps with Philippians 1: 23 in mind.⁸¹ Speaking of Urbanus Rhegius (the reformer of Luneberg), Luther says:

We are to know that he is blessed and that he has eternal life and eternal joy and participation with Christ in the heavenly Church.

This may seem at first sight to be irreconcilable with soul-sleep, but Althaus points out that, for Luther, the two views are not incompatible, since the temporal categories which we have here on earth do not apply after death. Earthly lapses of time are then of little consequence. The intermediate state lasts for only a very short time. When people die, the Last Judgment comes, either as soon as they die, or very soon afterwards.⁸² If we were to enquire into Luther's beliefs about the location of the dead, we would find that he is more interested in theological rather than topographical discussion. He is certain that all who die in faith, have their 'peace' in God's word and Christ's promise. The fathers of the Old Testament, he holds, rest in Abraham's bosom; that is the word of promise given to Abraham⁸³. They 'rest' and 'sleep' in the bosom of Christ. This is Luther's definitive statement about the condition of the departed.

Althaus draws attention to the fact that later Lutheran theology departs from the concept of soul-sleep, reverting to the medieval tradition that souls live in a blessed condition with Christ before the resurrection, even though they are without bodies.

⁸⁴But, as Luther himself had pointed out, this would detract from the resurrection itself – "It would take a foolish soul to desire its body when it was already in heaven."⁸⁵

⁸⁰ Luther, WA, 43, 360, 24-33.

⁸¹ Luther, WA, 53, 400.

⁸² Althaus, P., *The Theology of Martin Luther*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 416.

⁸³ In Luther's words – "So all of the fathers who lived before the birth of Christ have gone to Abraham's bosom, that is, they died firmly believing this word of God (Genesis 22:18), and they have all fallen asleep, are preserved and protected in this word, and sleep in it until the Last Day, as though this word were a bosom." – WA, 10, III, 191.

⁸⁴ Althaus, op.cit., 417.

⁸⁵ Luther, WA, TR5, 5534.

Soul-sleep. is unacceptable to this thesis which argues for spiritual development and sanctification in the intermediate state, which would necessitate consciousness.

The other prominent Protestant school of thought reacting to the rejection of purgatory is that of Calvin and his followers. The *Psychopannychia* of Calvin was written with the express purpose of opposing the Anabaptist idea of the sleep of the soul between death and the final judgment. Calvin bases his position on the biblical view that the souls of believers after death are in a state of alertness, with, and in, Christ, actively praising him, and waiting for the resurrection of the body.

Like Luther, Calvin believes that death marks the separation of the soul from the body. The soul, freed from the body, enters the sphere of blessedness. Death is the end of the fight for believers, since they no longer have to struggle against the desires of the flesh.⁸⁶

Calvin, therefore, agrees with Luther that the soul is immortal, but Quistorp draws a distinction between Calvin's creationism and Lutheran traducianism.⁸⁷ Calvin realises, of course, the sinfulness of the soul, and that, in a certain sense, it too must die. But this death is a spiritual death – something different from the death of the body. But Jesus Christ is the saviour from this death of the soul. Calvin pictures the life of the believer's soul as an upward progress. There are various stages, one beginning at death, when the soul enters upon a blessed immortality. Here, Calvin differs noticeably from Luther, in holding that this new postmortem life of the soul would be destroyed if Luther's idea of 'soul-sleep' followed death. Calvin's eschatology, as Torrance observes, is 'activist' whereas Luther's is 'quietist'.⁸⁸ Calvin's protests against soul-sleep, because he does not see how souls can grow and progress towards the vision of sleep if "they become buried in the comatose condition of sleep". He

⁸⁶ Calvin, *On Philippians 1:6* CR (*Corpus Reformatorum*), 8.9f.

⁸⁷ Quistorp, H., *Calvin's Doctrine of the Last Things*, (London: Lutterworth Press, 1955), 62. – "The soul or the spirit of man is a substance distinct from the body" (Calvin, *Psychopannychia*, 32:184), "While the creature is shaped in the maternal body, God breathes into it a soul". (Calvin, *Sermon on Job*, 3:16; CR 61, 162). Quistorp comments – Thus Calvin teaches with Augustine and Roman dogmaticians the doctrine of creationism, while Lutheran dogmaticians teach that of traducianism – the creation of the soul in and with the emergence of the body in the sense of *creatio continua*."

⁸⁸ Torrance, T.F., "The Eschatology of the Reformation" in *Scottish Journal of Theology*, Occasional Paper 2, (1953), 55.

describes the postmortem condition of the soul as one of 'rest'. The souls of the saved attain eternal peace in death. They are in Abraham's bosom; they are already with God and Christ. This rest of the soul is no idle leisure, for in its waking condition the soul can display its capacities, particularly reason and will, to the honour of God, and thus live out its true life. The rest of the soul also consists in peace of conscience, and awareness of reconciliation with God through faith. As the intermediate state is, for Calvin, one of the progress of the soul, we have here another difference from Luther's beliefs, because Calvin regards the interim period between death and the last judgment as a time period, according to the measure of our time. Lurking behind this issue, there lies the important philosophical problem of time and eternity. We might also note that although Calvin rejects purgatory, he allows progress towards perfection in the intermediate state. Although the righteous, when they die, are with Christ, they do not enjoy to the full, the great blessedness of heaven, which is not to be received until the resurrection at the end of the age.⁸⁹ With death, the saint enters immediately into God's kingdom, which has begun, but is to be perfected. While the intermediate state is a blessed state, it is imperfect, in Calvin's view without the body and its rewards. The conclusion of this thesis will be much more in line with Calvin's thought than with Luther's.

The other outstanding characteristic of this period is that it is, in Calvin's eyes, a time of expectation. This expectation is no longer based on faith, but now on sight. Souls await, indeed, what they have not yet, but they are nevertheless happy, because they both realise their adoption in God, and see their future reward, resting in assured hope of the resurrection. One would like to know more about how Calvin views the intermediate state, but he discourages such speculation as imprudent, which is why God has hidden the particular details from us.⁹⁰

What, then, does Calvin have to say about the fate of the wicked after death? Here, too, he opposes the doctrine of the soul's sleep, as there is no rest in death for the impious. Their souls are agitated with the terrible fear of the judgment which awaits them. They suffer a foretaste of hell, experiencing the fate which Jude allots to the

⁸⁹ Calvin, *Commentary on John 14:2*.

⁹⁰ Calvin, *ibid.*, 81, 213.

devils who are bound in chains until they suffer the punishment to which they are condemned.⁹¹

Yeaton comments on this, that they are not confined to a given location, but are, in some sense, free to move about at will.

If a man's fate is the same as that of the apostate angels, it would seem that man's punishment would also be of a similar nature. If this is true, man's punishment in the intermediate state would consist of:

1. Not living in God's presence.
2. Being held in 'chains'.
3. A lack of joy and the loss of the light of God, being instead in utter darkness.
4. A loss of dignity.⁹²

We might wonder whether Calvin makes any concessions, concerning the fate of those who had not had an opportunity to hear and respond to the gospel. The answer is clearly in the negative. His doctrine of predestination includes the idea that if some people had not been given the opportunity to hear the gospel message, this is rightly seen as a sign that God had predestined them to eternal damnation.⁹³ This belief is, of course, incompatible with this thesis's conclusion about the possibility of postmortem evangelism.

Martin Luther appears to be much better disposed to the question of the salvation of the unevangelised. Whether he could be regarded as one who supports universally accessible salvation is unclear. At the very least, he does not appear to oppose 'the wider hope'.

⁹¹ Jude 6, in Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.25.6.

⁹² Yeaton, K., "Aspects of Calvin's Eschatology" in *The Churchman*, 100, (1986), 117. Yeaton comments on Calvin's *Commentary on Jude* 6.

⁹³ Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.14.12. – "As the Lord by the efficacy of his calling accomplishes towards his elect, the salvation to which he had by his eternal counsel destined them, so he has judgments against the reprobate, by which he executes his counsel concerning them. Those, therefore, whom he has created for dishonour during life, and destruction at death, they may be vessels of wrath and examples of severity, in bringing to their doom, he at one time deprives of the means of hearing his word, at another, by preaching of it, blinds and stupifies them the more." On this severe doctrine of Calvin's, Sullivan makes this comment – "For Calvin, the mere fact that the newly discovered people in the New World had not, until now, had a chance to hear the gospel preached, is a manifest sign that all their ancestors were among the reprobate, for if God had willed their salvation, he would have made it possible for them to come to the knowledge of the truth, and thus, to faith in Christ, without which there was no possibility of their salvation. Even now, when they have a chance to hear the gospel, it is God's intention, with regard to those whom he had predestined to damnation, that it should blind them and make them all the more guilty." – Sullivan, *op.cit.*, 78.

Huldrych Zwingli is another Reformer, who like Calvin, attacks purgatory because it conflicts, in his belief, with salvation which is through faith in Christ. Also, because he does not accept the apocryphal books as canonical, he rejects Maccabees as support for the doctrine.⁹⁴ For Zwingli, faith in Christ is central, and if we have to make atonement for our sins in purgatory, this makes Christ's death on the Cross of no avail. He might be said to have died in vain.⁹⁵ Zwingli also believes that those who die without faith are condemned irrespective of election.⁹⁶ Moreover, he rejects the use of the sacrament as a *viaticum*, or nourishment for the road, once people are dead, because they are then off the road. Either, they are with God in which case they no longer need the sacrament, or, they are condemned and therefore have no further use for it⁹⁷.

Before the Reformation period is left behind, it is worth enquiring how the Reformation Confessions regard these matters. The Westminster Confession of Faith, in particular, includes ideas which show the long-standing influence of the Augustinian tradition. Continental theology, stemming from Calvin is also expressed in many of its Articles, and Scots representation at the Dutch Synod of Dort in 1619, influenced the writings of Scottish theologians, such as David Deelisch and Samuel Rutherford.⁹⁸ The Westminster Confession also draws upon the writings of English Puritans who learned their theology from other Zurich theologians, notably Bullinger. The covenant theology of the Puritans can be added to the Augustinian theology of the Brelist tradition, and the Reformed theology of the continent as the major influences upon the Westminster divines. On the destiny of the unevangelised, the Westminster Confession has this to say:

Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit, who worketh when, where and how he pleaseth.

⁹⁴ Zwingli, II. 414.3-8; 419.22-420.11.

⁹⁵ Zwingli, II. 427.22-7; V.193.11-12.

⁹⁶ Zwingli, II.426.19-25.

⁹⁷ Zwingli, *Writings: The Defence of the Reformed Faith*, vol.1. trans. E.J. Furcha. (Pennsylvania: Pickwick Publications, 1984), 122.

⁹⁸ See Fergusson, D.A.S., "Predestination: A Scottish Perspective" in *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 46 (1991), 464.

So, also, are other elect persons, who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word.⁹⁹

This would appear to permit the salvation of some unevangelised, but, on the other hand, the writers do specifically rule out the idea that:

people not professing the Christian religion, be saved in any other way whatsoever, be they never so diligent to frame their lives according to the light of nature and the law of that religion they do profess.¹⁰⁰

This would appear to be designed as a safeguard against any idea that another religion could be a permitted way of approaching God. The general teaching of both the Westminster Confession and the Second Helvetic Confession is that the souls of believers, immediately after death, enter upon the glories of heaven, where they await the full redemption of their bodies, whereas the souls of the wicked after death, are cast into hell, and, for disembodied souls, there is, according to scripture, no other destination, apart from heaven and hell.¹⁰¹

In conclusion, one would say that the Reformers hold out little hope of posthumous conversion, and certainly Calvin would reject any possibility of repentance after death. He does, however, believe in an intermediate state, where believers make progress towards perfection.

Despite the rejection of purgatory at the Reformation, a case can be made out for modernising the concept.¹⁰² Apart from its scriptural basis, the argument for a Protestant version of purgatory arises from the fact that when we die, no-one is perfect. The process of sanctification, even if begun in this life, has some way to go beyond death. Even although believers have been justified by faith, they require daily to 'die to sin'. Growth in holiness implies development from a worse state of soul to a

⁹⁹ *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 10.3.

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*, 10.4.

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*, 32.

¹⁰² W.R. Matthews was a prominent supporter of the idea of a modernised version of purgatory, as follows – "To me the idea of an intermediate state has many attractions. Of how many people could we say, 'There is no spark of good left in him' and of how many 'there is no seed of evil'? Do we not feel of almost everyone we have known that he is too good to be cast on the scrap heap of the universe, and too far from perfection to be fitted for the full vision of God? So, I believe, that our opportunities of training and development continue after death." – Matthews, W.R., *The Hope of Immortality*, (London: SCM Press, 1936), 65.

better state. Whereas in heaven perfection will have been reached, in the intermediate state, sins still have to be repented of, and impurities cleansed before the soul is ready for perfect communion with God. It is likely that the postmortem encounter with Christ will effect a more powerful spiritual growth than usually occurs before death. There would be no complete break between life here and life hereafter. The departed spirit would progress from where it left off at death. The personality would retain memory, otherwise it would not be the same person. The sins of the past would come before the awakened conscience in their true colours. Exactly how such continuity would be achieved is shrouded in mystery, but it is here that Polkinghorne makes an interesting suggestion. If, as this thesis contends, resurrection of the body is more likely than immortality of the soul, there requires to be a new creation of the personality by God. The continuing link, Polkinghorne, surmises, could be an "information bearing pattern" which God imparts to the recreated soul, from his knowledge of its past life.¹⁰³ As freedom of the will continues beyond death, being part of the dignity of responsible human beings, there would be the possibility of spiritual regression as well as development. In those souls habituated to evil ways and rejection of God, the spark of the divine might be so faint as to be beyond revival. Such a degraded soul would be on the way to annihilation. In order for there to be spiritual development or its opposite, temporal categories would seem to apply in the intermediate state; souls would be at varying stages of development, and it is far from clear when a soul would reach such a state that it could graduate to the beatific vision and full communion with God in heaven. The period of purgation could vary from individual to individual, but there can be no assurance on whether some perfected souls attain heaven before the final consummation at the end of history, or whether the full enjoyment of eternal life is experienced by all simultaneously, at the Last Judgment.

(d) Conclusion

¹⁰³ Polkinghorne says: "It is a perfectly coherent hope that the information-bearing pattern that is a human being could be held in the divine memory after that person's death...It is a further coherent hope, and one for which the resurrection of Jesus provides the foretaste and guarantee, that God in the eschatological future will re-embody this multitude of information-bearing patterns in some new embodiment of God's choosing." – Polkinghorne, J., *The God of Hope and the End of the World*, (London: SPCK., 2002), 107-8.

In this chapter, the development of the idea of an intermediate state has been traced through the teaching of the Early Church Fathers, building upon the foundation of scripture. Dualist thinking which pictures judgment taking place at death with the just entering upon eternal bliss and the unjust consigned to eternal damnation gives way to Alexandrian theology with the intermediate state becoming a state of purification and healing. The pendulum swings back with the influential theology of Augustine, rejecting posthumous conversion and universalism in favour of the 'double outcome'. Belief in purgation in an intermediate state becomes more prominent in the medieval period, especially in the thought of Aquinas, the major theologian of the period. Again, there is no hope of postmortem repentance, and the destiny of the unevangelised is not a significant problem. A marked shift in eschatological thinking occurs at the Reformation, with the rejection of purgatory because of lack of scriptural support, and since it is held to undermine justification by faith. Distinctions between the positions of Luther and Calvin are noted, particularly in regard to soul-sleep. While the 'wider hope' is not opposed by Luther, Calvin's doctrine of predestination rules out any possibility of salvation for the unevangelised.

It is interesting to note that some of the ideas promoted by opentheists in the modern period are not original to them, but were held by theologians in the earlier periods described in this chapter. For example, the salvation of good pagans who lived before Christ, a belief held by the opentheist, John Sanders, is to be found in the writings of Peter Abelard in the early 12th century. Moreover, Aquinas held views which were similar to Clark Pinnock's inclusivism. One of opentheism's basic axioms – the universal, salvific will of God is also to be found in the theology of Aquinas. Also, the refusal of opentheists to allow for postmortem repentance and "second chances" had been the position of the Reformers many centuries before.

The main contributions made by theologians of the Patristic, Medieval and Reformation periods to the conclusions of this thesis derive from the continuing belief in an intermediate state with the prospect of gradual spiritual growth, including medicinal purgation – views particularly evident in the Alexandrian theology of Clement, Origen and Gregory of Nyssa. Where this thesis departs markedly from the earlier periods is in its rejection of Augustinian dualist eschatology and predestination, and in its advocacy of postmortem repentance. The following chapter considers an

article of the faith of the Early Church which takes a more positive view of the ultimate fate of the unevangelised – our Lord’s descent to hell.

CHAPTER 3

CHRIST'S DESCENT INTO HELL

The idea that Christ spent some time in the realm of the dead between his death and resurrection is widespread in the New Testament. A number of other early Christian texts also assume the presence of Christ and, in some cases, of the apostles, in the underworld. As will be noted, these traditions persisted right down to Augustine, and indeed, even later. It will be necessary to explore the possibility that the visit and stay of Christ in the underworld was understood in these biblical and patristic texts as a mission to effect some kind of posthumous rescue. In this study, therefore, of the final destiny of the unevangelised, the descent of Christ into hell assumes particular importance.

(a) The Descent in the Creeds

In popular thought, the "descent into hell" is usually associated with the article of the Apostles' Creed - "He descended into hell". This article was one of the latest additions to the Creed. Its first credal appearance was in the Fourth Formula of Sirmium of 359, which affirmed that the Lord had "died and descended to the underworld, and regulated things there, when the gates of hell saw and shuddered"¹. There are early references to the descent in the sources of various eastern creeds; it was also included in the Athanasian Creed, composed about the middle of the fifth century, and accepted by both East and West, probably reaching western formularies under influence from the East. It did not finally become part of the universally accepted Apostles' Creed until the eighth century, although, before that, it is mentioned in local forms of that Creed. There have been various opinions regarding the source of the idea. A large group of modern Protestant scholars, of whom Beare is a notable representative, have detected an application to Christ of a redemption myth, common in the ancient world (best known in the ancient story of the Descent of Ishtar to the underworld)². Yet, Kelly rejects this source, maintaining that the doctrine need have had no connection with pagan mythology, though he concedes that similar parallels appeared there. The notion derives, rather, from Judaeo-Christian ideas about the condition of the soul after death³. It was a common assumption in Second Temple Judaism, and also in Greek thought of the period, that the dead existed in an underworld, termed Sheol or Hades. Early Christians would therefore naturally

¹ Kelly, J.N.D., *Early Christian Creeds* (London: Longmans, Green & Co, 1950), 378

² See Dalton, W.J., *Christ's Proclamation to the Spirits*, (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1965), 21.

³ Kelly, J.N.D., *op.cit.*, 380.

believe that Christ, by virtue simply of his death, would enter the underworld.⁴ The idea of a descent would appear to presuppose the ancient cosmology, according to which, there was a vast cavern under the earth, forming the abode of departed shades. Von Balthasar, however, believes that it does not necessarily imply a 'mythical three-story world picture', but expresses rather the way in which ordinary people regarded light and heaven as situated 'above' darkness, and the world of graves 'below.'⁵

However that may be, the idea of a descent into this region only occurred in the later apocalyptic literature (e.g. the Book of Enoch)⁶.

It is interesting to enquire into the motives at work in the insertion of the clause into the Creed. In early times, the descent of Christ's soul to Hades was used as an argument against the Apollinarian denial of a human soul in Christ. The soul of Christ was thought to be that of a mere man by death, but Christ came with a soul which could not be kept in bonds, in order to burst the bonds of those kept in bonds, and to give them freedom. If, however, polemical motives are to be sought with the intention of combating heresy, Kelly believes that Docetism would be the obvious target, and that the details of our Lord's experiences were elaborated to underline the reality of his death⁷. Pannenberg probes more deeply into the intention with the view that the article was inserted in order to describe in more detail what happened to Jesus when he died. Death, for him, was more than a physical experience. He suffered the same fate as human beings do – death as the consequence of sin, which meant that they were shut out from God and salvation.⁸

(b) The Descent in the New Testament

In turning to the New Testament to find scripture warrant for the descent, scholars such as Ayo⁹ and Schwarz¹⁰ are united in maintaining that it is nowhere explicitly mentioned in the New Testament, and that, therefore, it is not possible to construe a doctrine of an actual descent of Christ to hell or the deceased. Yet it may be suggested

⁴ MacCulloch, J.A., *The Harrowing of Hell*, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1930), 313. – "The disciples must have believed that the soul of Christ between his death and resurrection, was in the Intermediate State, or Hades, whether in the better part of it, or, more vaguely, within its bounds". See also Bauckham, R., *The Fate of the Dead: Studies on the Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 38. – "Since the commonest Jewish view in New Testament times was that all the dead descend to She'ol (Hades), Jesus' descent to Hades was simply the corollary of his death".

⁵ Von Balthasar, H.U., *Mysterium Paschale*, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1970), 150.

⁶ 1 Enoch 17-36.

⁷ Kelly, op.cit., 382.

⁸ Pannenberg, W., *The Apostles' Creed in the Light of Today's Questions*, (London: SCM., 1972), 90.

⁹ Ayo, N., *Creed as Symbol* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 72.

¹⁰ Schwarz, H., *Eschatology*, (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2000), 347.

in several passages. St Matthew 12:40 describes the Son of Man as being “three days and nights in the heart of the earth” – a passive stay in the realm of the dead. Hanson maintains that this verse definitely implies a *descensus ad inferos*,¹¹ but Wayne Grudem, on the other hand, believes that it simply refers to the fact that Christ was in the grave between his death and resurrection.¹² Texts such as Revelation 1:18, where Christ is said to possess the keys to the underworld, and can open its gates, portray him as the one who has won the victory over the powers of death and Hades. At other places, in the context of Christ’s death and resurrection, the redemption of some or all of the dead is mentioned. This is particularly so in St Matthew 27:51-53 which describes the incident of the raising of the dead saints. The description of them as ‘saints’ indicates that, while they were alive before the coming of Christ, they had proved themselves worthy. Trumbower describes it as a “posthumous rescue, but not posthumous salvation”, since the passage does not make it clear “whether these raised-up righteous ones died again, ascended into heaven, or were still living on earth as the author wrote.”¹³ The rescue, which occurred almost before the crucified Christ breathed his last, was thought by various Patristic writers to be connected with Christ’s appearance in Hades.

Support for the idea of the descent has been principally found in the following five passages – Acts 2:24-28; Romans 10:6-7; Ephesians 4:8-9; 1 Peter 3:18-20; 4:6

1. Acts 2:24-28.

Hanson detects behind v.24, “freeing him from the agony of death”, an Aramaic or Hebrew source, in which the phrase means that God “loosed the cords of death.”¹⁴ Hence, the concept is of Christ lying in the realm of death and being delivered from it by God. We are prepared for a reference to the *descensus*, and he finds it in vv.25-28. This is part of Peter’s sermon on the day of Pentecost, where he is quoting Psalm 16:10. Grudem, however, holds that the Old Testament ‘Sheol’ here means simply ‘the grave’ or ‘the state of death’, and that Peter is using David’s Psalm to show that Christ’s body did not decay, and that the passage, therefore, is about the resurrection, and does not convincingly support the idea that Christ descended into hell.¹⁵

2. Romans 10:6-7.

¹¹ Hanson, A.T., *The New Testament Interpretation of Scripture*, (London: SPCK., 1980), 148.

¹² Grudem, W., “He Did Not Descend Into Hell: A Plea For Following Scripture Instead Of The Apostles’ Creed” in *JETS* 34/1 (March 1991), 107, n.5.)

¹³ Trumbower, op.cit., 93.

¹⁴ Hanson, op.cit., 153.

¹⁵ Grudem, W., op.cit., 107.

Some scholars, including, for example, Hanson¹⁶ and Stauffer,¹⁷ believe that St Paul's belief in the descent can be deduced from a number of passages including Rom. 10:6-7, where he says, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down), "or, 'Who will descend into the deep?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). This interpretation, however, is disputed by Grudem, who holds that 'the deep' in v.7 refers not to hell as a place of punishment, but rather to a place "that is inaccessibly low (the deep, or the realm of death)". *Abyssos* is a term often used in the Septuagint for the depths of the ocean, but can also apparently refer to the realm of the dead. He therefore concludes that "No clear affirmation or denial of a descent into hell can be found in this passage."¹⁸

3. Ephesians 4:8-9.

In this passage the writer quotes from Psalm 68:18, and then asks:

What does 'he ascended' mean except that he also descended to the lower earthly regions? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.

Hanson's position in supporting a reference to the descent is as follows:

The right interpretation seems to be that the author of Ephesians had no difficulty in finding in Ps.68 a typological reference to the resurrection and ascension of Christ, but that he could not find any obvious reference to the *descensus* there, and therefore wrote vv.9-10.¹⁹

Grudem, again, opposes there being any reference to the descent here, and bases his opinion on the NIV translation (which is used above), and which speaks of 'the lower, earthly regions'. Grudem finds here a reference, not to a descent into hell, but to the incarnation.²⁰

W. Hall Harris, however, who has written a whole book on the descent to Christ in Eph.4:7-11, concludes that it is not a mission (between Christ's death and

¹⁶ Hanson, op.cit., 140.

¹⁷ Stauffer, E., *New Testament Theology*, (London: SCM., 1955), 134.

¹⁸ Grudem, op.cit., 108.

¹⁹ Hanson, op.cit., 140.

²⁰ Grudem, W., op.cit., 108.

resurrection), but that it occurs after the ascension, and indicates that the ascended Christ descended as the Spirit to impart gifts to his church. (4:11-16).²¹

4. 1 Peter 3:19.

The greatest scholarly comment by far, however, has been reserved for the two passages in 1 Peter 3:19 and 4:6. In 1 Peter 3:18-20, we read:

For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body, but made alive in the Spirit, through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built.

If this letter is the work of St Peter, it would seem natural to think that these sentences must be based on special knowledge given to St Peter by his Master after the resurrection, which would make them authoritative. The passages, however, abound with difficulty. The first question to be answered is - Who were the 'spirits in prison'? They are either the souls of human beings who have died, to whose souls Christ turned when he went to preach, or, they are supernatural beings. If they are human souls, to which dead persons does the verse refer? Bigg treats 3:19 and 4:6 as referring to the same event, and says that the context "seems to imply that they (the spirits) were those of the men who refused to listen to Noah." He cites Hebrews 12:23 as showing that *pneumata* can be used of the spirits of human beings after death. The reference in 4:6 to the gospel being preached to the dead, he believes, confirms this interpretation.²² Cranfield follows Bigg in identifying the 'spirits in prison' as the generation of mankind that perished in the Flood. They would be mentioned as being generally regarded as the most notorious and abandoned of sinners. "If there was hope for them," says Cranfield, "then none could be beyond the realm of Christ's saving power."²³ There is a further reason why the Noachian sinners, overwhelmed in the Flood, may have been specially mentioned at this point. Dublin alludes to this when he observes that for Jews in the apostolic age, the waters of the Flood were the waters leading to Hades, the abode of the dead. The disobedient in Noah's days were thought of as examples of what happened to the sinful when they entered the

²¹ Harris, III., W.H., *The Descent of Christ in Ephesians 4:7-11, and Traditional Hebrew Imagery*, (New York and Koln: E.J. Brill, 1996), 31.

²² Bigg, C., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St Peter and St Jude*, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1910), 162.

²³ Cranfield, C.E.B., *The First Epistle of Peter*, (London: SCM., 1950), 85.

Abyss which is Hades. The “waters of the Flood were conceived of as the abysmal waters which burst forth in judgment.”²⁴

A powerful point in favour of this interpretation is that it was the common tradition of the Fathers of the Early Church who identified ‘the spirits’ as Noah’s sinful contemporaries, or else those Jews and Greeks who lived before the incarnation. This, indeed, was by far the most strongly represented view up to Augustine.

Although the descent was a popular theme in earlier times, the first of the Early Fathers to cite 1 Peter 3:19 specifically was Clement of Alexandria.²⁵ Origen, too, clearly understood the verse 3:19 in the same way,²⁶ as did St Cyril of Alexandria.²⁷ This interpretation, however, was later abandoned by the Fathers, as it could be taken to imply the possibility of the conversion of sinners in the next world. Augustine resorted to the possibility that the Petrine passages do not refer to hell or Christ’s descent at all. Maybe the “spirits shut up in prison” are people living now and “the dead” are unbelievers, as in Christ’s saying – “let the dead bury their own dead.” (St. Matt.8:22) ²⁸This would mean that Christ, pre-existing in his divine nature, preached to Noah’s contemporaries, while they were still alive, imprisoned in sin and ignorance. This line of interpretation was followed for more than a thousand years, but the majority of scholars today regard it as far-fetched.

The other line of interpretation that ‘the spirits in prison’ are supernatural beings – the fallen angels referred to in Genesis 6:1-4 – is supported by a powerful body of scholarly opinion, including Selwyn, Dalton, Kelly, Best and Achtemeier. While there are instances in the New Testament of *pneumata* as the spirits of human beings, as noted above by Bigg, Selwyn finds that it is used overwhelmingly to refer, not to human dead, but to supernatural beings who are primarily malevolent.²⁹ Achtemeier notes the existence of a clear Jewish tradition recording the imprisonment of the angelic beings of Gen.6:1-6, whose disobedience caused the Flood. The word used to describe them is *pneumata*, and so, in Achtemeier’s view should be understood as non-human. (1 Enoch 13:6; 15:4,6,7).³⁰

²⁴ Dublin, J., “The Descent into Hades and Christian Baptism”, in *The Expositor*, XI (1916), 135.

²⁵ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 6.6. 38-53.

²⁶ Origen, *Contra Celsum* 11.43.

²⁷ Cyril of Alexandria, *Hom. Pasch.*, 7.2.185-189. Dalton, W.J. op.cit., 18-19, also finds an echo of it in St John Damascene in his *De Fide Orthodoxa*. Lib.4 cap.29 – *De Descensu ad Inferos*. and also in the early Syriac tradition.

²⁸ Augustine, *Epistolae* 164.5.15.

²⁹ Selwyn, E.G., *The First Epistle of Peter*, (London: SCM., 1950), 198.

³⁰ Achtemeier, P., *1 Peter*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 256.

He follows Kelly³¹ and Reicke³² in maintaining that it is this tradition which underlies the reference here to 'spirits'. Yet, as Dublin points out, although the idea of fallen angels in bondage is a favourite theme with Jewish apocalyptic writers, the idea of Christ actually *preaching* to the fallen angels is one not found elsewhere in Christian literature.³³ It is interesting that Reicke, followed by Hanson,³⁴ expresses the idea that the phrase 'disobedient spirits' could cover both sinful human beings and fallen angels.

The questions which now arise are – Where is the prison of these spirits, and when did the 'preaching' take place? The precise location of the confinement is not clear, although most scholars conclude that it describes a *descensus ad inferos*. As to the timing of Christ's journey, three solutions have been offered, according to Best.³⁵ (a) before his incarnation. This goes back to Augustine, but is out of sequence with the thought of 3:18-22 which moves from Christ's death to his heavenly session. (b) between his death and resurrection. As was noted above, other passages in the New Testament could suggest such a journey during the interval. This was also the view of Patristic writers beginning with Clement of Alexandria in the late second century. (c) at the ascension. Best opts for the second solution, and Hanson and Cranfield agree. In view of the latter's opinion that the spirits were the souls of dead people, it was perhaps natural for him (and many others before him) to assume that the 'prison' denoted the nether world (Sheol). Kelly, Dalton and Achtemeier, nevertheless, once again present powerful arguments in favour of (c). Kelly notes the evidence from 1 Enoch 18:12-14 that the prison is an abyss at the end of heaven. According to 2 Enoch 1-3,³⁶ dating from the early first century A.D., both the world of the dead and the world of spirits, good and evil, are now located above the earth, and Enoch relates how he came across the apostate angels, tormented and weeping, in the second heaven. Kelly concludes that the context of the passage here in 1 Peter points decisively to the upper regions, and advances three arguments in favour of the ascension. Dalton rejects (b) in favour of (c), believing that the words "He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit". (1 Peter 3:18) refer to Christ's bodily resurrection at the end of the triduum, and hence the preaching to the spirits took place after that, that is, during the forty days between the resurrection and the ascension. This preaching, he holds, took place in the realm of the air, which,

³¹ Kelly, J.N.D., *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and Jude*, (London: A.&C. Black 1969), 153.

³² Reicke Bo. *The Disobedient Spirits and Christian Baptism: A Study of 1 Peter 3.19 and its Context*, (Copenhagen: Ejnar Munksgaard, 1946), 90-91.

³³ Dublin, op.cit., 135.

³⁴ Hanson, op.cit., 130.

³⁵ Best, op.cit., 85.

³⁶ cf. *Testament of Levi* 3.2.

according to him, is where the rebellious angels were confined. Trumbower is also inclined to agree here with Dalton.³⁷

The next question to be answered is – What was it that Christ preached? The traditional view, supported by, among others, Beare³⁸, Best,³⁹ Cranfield⁴⁰ and Hunter⁴¹ is that he preached the gospel of salvation to dead human beings. They interpret the verse in this way because it seems to them more satisfactory to take ‘preached’ in its normal New Testament sense, that is, the gospel. Additional evidence cited is the identity of the verse with 1 Peter 4:6, where proclamation of salvation to human dead is clearly found. Hanson, in supporting this view, advances the conjecture that the opening verses of Psalm 89 may have been part of the background of this passage. The words – “In the heavens shall thy truth be prepared.” (Ps.89:2) may provide a hint that Christ’s message of salvation was preached to the angelic powers. He believes that there is present in this passage, the idea that Christ in his *descensus* turned the waters of chaos into the saving waters of baptism.⁴² Selwyn, Kelly and Achtemeier, however, take a very different line. Selwyn notes that in Roman 5:2, the Greek word used here, is there used of an angel’s proclamation, and he thinks that this neutral meaning is more probable here.⁴³ Kelly, coming to the same conclusion, makes two additional points. He draws a parallel between the post-resurrection activity of Christ and the legendary mission of Enoch, declaring that Peter saw Enoch as a type of Christ. His task had been to declare, not forgiveness but doom to the apostles. Christ’s ‘proclamation to the spirits’ could then be understood as his triumphant announcement that their power had been finally broken. Kelly’s second additional point is that such a message would stiffen the conscience of the Asian Christians as they faced insults and attacks. Their attackers are merely reproducing the rebellious characteristics of the demonic powers whose agents they still are, and will surely share their destruction.⁴⁴ Achtemeier follows Selwyn and

³⁷ Kelly, op.cit., 155 – The three arguments are as follows: (1) It is natural to regard Christ’s journey as taking place after his being made “alive in the spirit”; and if these words denote his resurrection, the journey must be his ascension.

(2) *poreuesthai* is nowhere used in the New Testament of “descending”. *Katabainein* would be more suitable.

(3) The present verse can hardly be dissociated from v.22, where the same word denotes his ascension. Both v.19 and v.22 would describe the same journey.

³⁸ Beare, F.W., *The First Epistle of Peter*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1970), 173.

³⁹ Best, op.cit., 144.

⁴⁰ Cranfield, op.cit., 86.

⁴¹ Hunter, A.M., *Exegesis of 1 Peter in Interpreters Bible (vol. 12)* (New York: Abingdon, 1957), 133.

⁴² Hanson, op.cit., 131.

⁴³ Selwyn, op.cit., 200 says – “Christ’s work of redemption was achieved: it still needed to be proclaimed, even to the disobedient angels who could not, in the ordinary sense of the term, repent, but who could be brought into subjection...we might find the substance of the proclamation in the judgment pronounced on the prince of this world in John 12:31; 16:11”.

⁴⁴ Kelly, op.cit., 156.

Kelly, noting other New Testament passages in which *kerussein* is used in a strictly neutral sense of 'proclamation', and also making the valid point that in the New Testament, Satan and the evil angels are not to be rescued but condemned.⁴⁵ This condemnation is to be understood as the outcome of Christ's victorious rising from the dead. Yet doubts remain in one's mind about this interpretation. Stauffer and Hanson, instead of finding a correspondence between the missions of Enoch and Christ, contrast them. This contrast is well-expressed by Stauffer who observes that, whereas the content of Enoch's preaching to the fallen angels of Gen.6 in Hades was God's eternal wrath, Christ's message, by contrast, when he descended to Hades, was good news to the dead. Noah had failed to bring the wicked generation of the Flood to repentance; the Flood swallowed them up, and their 'spirits' were imprisoned in Hades – but into that same prison the crucified Christ, in his preaching, called them to a decision with the message of salvation.⁴⁶

This is also Hanson's opinion, for he notes that this is a Christian text, and so "the redeeming mission of Christ is all-important here."⁴⁷ This is persuasive, as a visit by Christ to proclaim victory and to pronounce condemnation upon rebellious sinners, even if they were minions of Satan, seems out of character for the Good Shepherd who goes out to find and rescue a lost sheep. Reicke, nevertheless, advises caution about reaching any conclusion about the purpose or result of the preaching⁴⁸.

5. The other relevant passage in 1 Peter occurs at 4:6

For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to men in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the Spirit.

Bigg understands 'the dead' in v.6 in the same sense as 'the living and the dead' in v.5, and must include all the dead, and not merely those who perished in the Flood. Death is the punishment which all human beings alike must pay, and so the object of the preaching was the salvation of the dead.⁴⁹ Best⁵⁰ and Cranfield⁵¹ follow Bigg in holding that the most natural interpretation is to connect it with 3:19, and to

⁴⁵ Achtemeier, *op.cit.*, 260 notes – "As the result of his resurrection, the powers of evil have been defeated, and the risen Christ, on his way to the right hand of power, announces to the imprisoned angelic powers, his victory, and hence, their defeat.

⁴⁶ Stauffer, *op.cit.*, 134.

⁴⁷ Hanson, *op.cit.*, 132..

⁴⁸ Reicke, *op.cit.*, 121.

⁴⁹ Bigg *op.cit.*, 157.

⁵⁰ Best, *op.cit.*, 156.

⁵¹ Cranfield, *op.cit.*, 90.

understand a reference to the 'spirits in prison'. In their view, the two texts probably refer to the same occasion – Christ's descent to Hades. The meaning would therefore be – "in order that though they have died as all men must (death itself being regarded as God's judgment), they might nevertheless live by God's power in the spirit." In the opinion of men, the dead have had their judgment, but the Good News has been preached even among them in order that those who respond to it might live eternally.

Some of the early commentators (Hermas, Clement of Alexandria, Irenaeus and Ignatius), restrict 'the preaching' to the just, guided probably by the mention of the 'saints' in Matt.27:52. But Bigg rejects this as he believes 3:20 clearly implies that St Peter regarded the offer as having been made to all, though some might have rejected the light in Hades.⁵²

Dalton also finds the restriction of 'the preaching' to the just, unacceptable, as Wis.3:1 teaches that "the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God", and Wis.5:15 that "the righteous live for ever, and their reward is with the Lord", and so one would wonder in what sense their life in 'Abraham's bosom' or in paradise was inadequate, so that Christ had to preach to them in order that they might live.⁵³

The same division among scholars occurs in the interpretation of 4:6 as was noted above in 3:19. Some believe 'the dead' means the spiritually dead, but the reference in v.5 almost certainly refers to the physically dead. Kelly notes that the aorist verb, 'was preached', points to a definite occasion, not to a general availability of the gospel to sinners; and he feels it to be improbable that 3:19 and 4:6 refer to the same event, because the former speaks of 'spirits', meaning disembodied souls or supernatural beings, whereas the latter speaks of 'dead persons' with no suggestion of disembodiment. Once again Kelly alludes to the context and says it is hard to see what comfort such verses would bring (under the traditional interpretation) to readers in their trying situation. Kelly's conclusion is that "those who are dead" were people who had lived in communities addressed by Christ. In response to his preaching, they had become Christian, but had since died.⁵⁴

Dalton and Achtemeier again follow Kelly, noting that the notion of disembodied souls in Hades is a view of the after-life which is quite absent from the New Testament. Kelly also believes that the possibility of repentance and conversion after death is an idea quite foreign to the New Testament. Moreover, he finds it odd that if

⁵² Bigg, op.cit., 157.

⁵³ Dalton, op.cit., 46.

⁵⁴ Kelly, op.cit., 174.

there is a reference to the Last Judgment in v.6, there is no mention of the rejection of the wicked - whereas in the New Testament, the final judgment always has a double outcome. Achtemeier concludes, as Kelly does, that the *nekroi* in this verse refers to Christian dead who, during their lifetime, had heard and accepted the gospel, but who had died prior to the return of Christ. Again he sees the context as relevant⁵⁵.

The interpretation of these verses by Cranfield and others seems attractive because it appears to give scripture warrant to the doctrine of postmortem conversion. Pinnock, for example, though admitting that the scriptural evidence for postmortem encounter is "not abundant", nevertheless observes that it seems to have some support in 1 Peter 3:19-20 - "where the text sounds as if the dead are given an opportunity to respond to Christ"⁵⁶. Yet, the exegesis of these verses by Selwyn, Kelly and Achtemeier is difficult to gainsay. The context is important. As Kelly and Achtemeier point out, if these verses imply the possibility of conversion and repentance for rebellious sinners, this would be of small consolation to those suffering persecution for their faith. What would be the effect upon them if they were told that their attackers could well eventually be confronted not with condemnation but with the gospel of salvation? That would do nothing to lift their morale. But if the verses meant that Satan and his angelic minions were to hear the proclamation of their defeat, then the stand of the persecuted would be vindicated, and their morale undoubtedly raised.⁵⁷

Powerful modern voices have, however, been raised in support of the traditional view. For example, Hans Küng includes 1 Peter 4:6 as evidence of a reconciliation for all, and mercy for everyone, basing his view also on 1 Cor.15:24-28 and Rom.5:18⁵⁸. Nevertheless, no doubt conceding the ambiguity in the interpretation of the Petrine passages, Küng is happier to appeal on more general grounds to the saving efficacy of the Cross as having power also in the world to come, which was also the standpoint of Origen in the third, and J.A.T. Robinson in the twentieth centuries. Advocates of postmortem conversion, who may be disappointed by the lack of fully-agreed, clear-cut, unambiguous, scriptural endorsement of their position have also received much

⁵⁵ Achtemeier, op.cit., 290, notes - "The verse points out that within the context of the final judgment, Christians who had suffered not only the obloquy of their contemporaries, but also the fate of death that seemed to demonstrate the fruitlessness of the life of self-denial they led, may nevertheless look forward to vindication in the final judgment".

⁵⁶ Pinnock, C., *A Wideness in God's Mercy*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Press, 1992), 169.

⁵⁷ This is also the view of Andrew Bandstra in a recent article - "(It is) most likely that 3:19 is referring to a 'victory proclamation' to the disobedient supernatural spirits. Peter is not interested in the reaction of the 'spirits' to the message, but to the fact that this is an important part of the message to the persecuted Christians to whom he is writing." - Bandstra, A.J., "Making Proclamation to the Spirits in Prison" in *Calvin Theological Journal* 38 (2003), 125.

⁵⁸ Küng, H., *On Being a Christian*, (London: Collins, 1977), 369.

encouragement from the views of Keith Ward. Ward holds that the natural reading of the Petrine passages is that Jesus's preaching is to the disobedient, and that preaching is meant to lead to penitence. He rejects Dalton's interpretation of 1 Peter 3:19 as referring to Jesus's condemnation of fallen angels, imprisoned between heaven and earth. This view, he says, "strikes me as very forced and weakly evidenced"⁵⁹ The traditional interpretation by such as Cranfield and Ward is the nearest this thesis gets to scriptural warrant in the sense of precise textual evidence.

At this point, the study departs from a precise focus on the biblical passages, and investigates later history of the wider doctrine, first in Patristic references. The earliest references to the descent seem to have been in Syriac materials, where it was probably synonymous with Christ's death and burial. Ignatius states⁶⁰ that before the time of Christ, the prophets were waiting expectantly for Christ; who came and raised them. He does not say precisely that Christ preached in Hades, but this is implied. Christ liberates them by transferring them from Hades to paradise, or heaven. Only the prophets benefit from this liberation. Polycarp does not actually mention the descent, but it is inferred by his references to Philippians 1 and Acts 2:24. In Hermas, it is the apostles and teachers, not Christ, who preach in Hades, and again, the benefits are reserved for the faithful dead.⁶¹

When attention is directed to the Greek Apologists, Justin Martyr is found quoting one of the passages, which he accused the Jews of expunging from the Old Testament – "The Lord God remembered his dead people of Israel who lay in their graves, and he descended to preach to them his own salvation"⁶². This passage is also quoted by Irenaeus, and seems to interpret Christ's "descent into the realm of the dead" as a liberation of the patriarchs of the Old Testament. Irenaeus is convinced that Christ preached salvation in Hades. He holds out "hope for those who feared God and were righteous"⁶³. Cook finds that "the doctrine is now almost safely embedded in the teaching of the Church".⁶⁴

In the teaching of Western theologians of the third century, there is a departure from the traditional view, that the captive righteous are liberated from Hades. Tertullian

⁵⁹ Ward, K., *Religion and Human Nature*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), 273.

⁶⁰ Ignatius, *Magnesian*, IX. 2.

⁶¹ Hermas, *Similitudes*, IX. 16.

⁶² Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 72.4.

⁶³ Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, IV., XVII. 2.

⁶⁴ Cook, D.L., *The Doctrine of the Descent into Hades in the New Testament, and its Development in Patristic Literature*, (University of Glasgow Ph.D., 1962), 102.

states precisely that Christ descends into Hades, but his purpose in so doing is to defeat the Devil, death and Hades⁶⁵. This is also the view, for example, of Lactantius, who also asserts Christ's victory over Hades and death.⁶⁶ This does not mean, however, the liberation of the captive righteous, and their translation into paradise, though it does mean that the just are not held in the grip of Hades eternally. Initially, then, the preaching of Christ was meant for the Old Testament saints, and not for everyone.

In later writings, for example, the Shepherd of Hermas, the scope of those thought to benefit from the preaching was widened:⁶⁷ also, the apostles were seen to be preaching to the deceased after their death. Nowhere is it a proclamation of the gospel to people who died as non-believers, calling them to repentance, or offering everybody salvation in Christ. Hades itself is divided into different spheres for the good and the bad. The descent of Christ is a visit only to the good part where the faithful of the Old Testament waited.

The first sign of a wider scope of salvation is to be found in the Christian version of the "Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs"⁶⁸ (200A.D.) Mention is made there of the conversion of disobedient hearts and of the descent of the Spirit upon them. Clement of Alexandria⁶⁹ extended the preaching in the underworld to include the conversion to faith of those deceased who died as unbelievers. He also thought that the souls of the apostles took up the same task when they died – not only to Jews and saints, but to the heathen as well, as they had no chance of knowing "as was only fair"⁷⁰. This still did not imply a full-scale universalism, as those who failed to repent at the preaching of Christ remained there, making Hades almost synonymous with Gehenna. Bigg believes that Clement "allowed the possibility of repentance and amendment till the Last Day"⁷¹. Punishment, in Clement's view, is purgatorial rather than retributive and he appears to be thinking, when speaking of purgatorial fires, more of the righteous than of unbelievers. This is a marked difference between his position and that of Origen. Trumbower points out that there is an unresolved question here as to whether Clement presupposed a universal offer of salvation to all the dead at the time of the

⁶⁵ Terrullian, *De Anima*, 7 and 55.

⁶⁶ Lactantius, *Divine Institutes*, IV. 12, 15.

⁶⁷ Shepherd of Hermas, *Similitudes*, iii. 16. Reference in Du-Toit, D.A., *Descensus and Universalism in Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell*, ed., N. Cameron (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1992), 80..

⁶⁸ *The Testament of Benjamin*, ix. 3.

⁶⁹ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 6.6.37-53.

⁷⁰ Paterson-Smyth, J., *The Gospel of the Hereafter*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1918), 52.

⁷¹ Bigg, *op.cit.*, 162.

descent. Trumbower believes that Clement's position here is ambiguous, but he concludes that Clement did envisage some of the dead having a change of heart towards God, "and thus he does believe to some extent in posthumous salvation."⁷²

When consideration is given to the thought of Origen, one of the most prominent theologians of the Early Church, one notes that he makes a clear distinction between Hades and Gehenna.⁷³ Hades is the abode of all the saints and repentant sinners who died before the time of Christ's death and resurrection. Gehenna, on the other hand, is the abode of the Devil, his demons and all hardened, unrepentant sinners – a place of fiery torment for the wicked, which Christ did not visit on his descent. Christ's preaching in Hades allows some of the dead to be transferred to paradise. Origen appears to have been the first to believe that all the saints could be admitted to paradise – previously it had been thought to be open only to martyrs. After Christ's descent, the just no longer go to Hades, but direct to paradise, and Hades is now closed. Purgatorial fire is an important concept in Origen's theology, but he does not seem to envisage an intermediate state between the death of the individual and the general resurrection.⁷⁴

Origen often describes the fires of Gehenna as 'eternal' and 'inextinguishable'.⁷⁵ Yet, in other texts, he suggests that the pains of Gehenna might come to an end. He defines *aionios* ('eternal') as 'a very long time'.⁷⁶ Hennessey says that he presents the doctrine "not as a dogma, but as a profound and secret hope; he has definite doubts and hesitations".⁷⁷

Gregory of Nyssa, is strongly influenced by Origen's thought, but he tends to think of Hades, not so much as a place, but rather as a condition of soul after death,⁷⁸ whereas Origen usually understands Christ's descent quite literally. Both Origen and Gregory consider that posthumous salvation is possible for everyone – albeit, in many cases, after a painful experience.

⁷² Trumbower, *op.cit.*, 99.

⁷³ Hennessey, L.R., "The Place of Saints and Sinners after Death" in Kannengiesser .C., and Petersen W.L., (eds.) *Origen of Alexandria*, (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 295.

⁷⁴ Hennessey explains Origen's thought succinctly – "...after death, each person passes through the process of purification, the baptism of fire: the saints and repentant sinners – the former unscathed, and the latter painfully purified – pass on to heaven, while the hardened, unrepentant sinners are sent to the "eternal fire" of Gehenna." – Hennessey, *ibid.*, 103.

⁷⁵ Origen, *Homily on Jeremiah* 12:5., and *Homily on Joshua*, 9:7.

⁷⁶ Origen, *Commentary on Romans* 6:5.

⁷⁷ Hennessey, *op.cit.*, 311.

⁷⁸ Gregory of Nyssa, "On the Soul and Resurrection" in *Patrologia Graeca*, ed. Migne 46.68, 83-4.

Augustine accepts the idea of Christ's descent, but is uncertain about what happened there. He admits that Christ rescued some in hell from their sorrows, those whom Christ thought worthy, but rejects posthumous salvation as being impossible now. Christ descended to rescue "those who were to be rescued".⁷⁹ He only went to the "souls at rest" like Lazarus and Abraham, and not to the wicked. Augustine believes that one's actions in this life are the decisive ones, and that no-one at Christ's descent repented or changed his or her relationship with God.

The most influential of the medieval thinkers who refer to the descent is Thomas Aquinas. By this time, the doctrine of purgatory has emerged in the Roman Catholic Church, and Aquinas teaches that Christ descends into that part of hell where the just are detained (i.e. purgatory), to give them hope of attaining to glory.⁸⁰ He quotes St John Damascene – "As he evangelised those who are upon the earth, so did he those who were in hell"⁸¹. Christ descended "not in order to convert unbelievers unto belief, but to put them to shame for their unbelief".⁸² He does not believe that Christ transfers the souls of the saints at once from hell to paradise, but rather delivers them "by enlightening them with the light of glory in hell itself"⁸³. Aquinas makes a clear distinction between purgatory and the "hell of the lost". He delivers those in purgatory by the power of his passion because, through being united to his passion through faith quickened by charity, their sins are taken away. But there is no such deliverance for those in "the hell of the lost", because they, as infidels, have no such faith in Christ's passion. Not everyone in purgatory is delivered from it. When Christ descended, he liberated only those who were already cleansed, or who, because of their faith and devotion towards Christ's death in their earthly lives, merited such a deliverance.⁸⁴

According to this medieval view, all that the final judgment can do is to confirm the judgment which has already been passed at the point of death, beyond which, even the power of God can produce no repentance or liberation. This doctrine will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 6 below.

(c) The Descent in Reformation Theology

⁷⁹ Augustine, *Epistolae*, 187.6.

⁸⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* Part III Second Number (QQ XXVII-LIX) tr. Fathers of the English Dominican Province. (London: R. & T. Washbourne Ltd., 1914), 363.

⁸¹ St John Damascene. *De Fide Orthodoxa* iii.

⁸² Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, op.cit., 364.

⁸³ Aquinas, *ibid.*, 376.

⁸⁴ Aquinas, *ibid.*, 375f.

Consideration must now be given to how Reformation theologians viewed the descent.
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According to both Luther and Calvin, Jesus experienced on the Cross hell's tortures in place of sinners. But Luther can admit an experience of hell, even for the dead Christ.⁸⁶ Christ would have truly gone down into hell, so as to undergo the *dolores postmortem*. For a time he was surrendered up wholly into the hands of the devil, and subjected to the full wrath of God's judgment. "He descended into the depths of all depths, under the law, under the devil, sin and hell, and that, I think, is verily the last and lowest depth"⁸⁷. But just this suffering is his triumph over hell, so much so that he can speak of a *victrix infirmitas*. In this respect, Luther is continuing the patristic tradition, seeing the descent to hell as the beginning of Christ's triumphal procession, his victory over the powers of sin and death. He interprets it as a summary of Christ's offensive against Satan and all his forces, against the dominion of death, and also, - this, above all, as a reference to the deliverance of the saints of the old covenant from their imprisonment in the realm of death. To stress the aspect of triumph in a unilateral way, interpreting the descent in terms of Christ's exaltation, rather than his humiliation became, according to Lewis, standard in Lutheran dogmatics⁸⁸. Although Christ suffered on the Cross the hell of forsakenness and absolute death, yet, as Moltmann points out, the Easter icons of the Orthodox Church associate the descent of Christ to the dead with the resurrection. It is the Risen Christ who breaks down their prison walls and leads them out into the freedom of eternal life. At the head of this procession are Adam and Eve.⁸⁹

The image of the crucified now appears, not as one who is humiliated and dishonoured but as Christ, the king, ruling from the Cross.

Calvin, and most Reformed theologians, found this interpretation too mythological, and offered a different explanation⁹⁰. What, asked Calvin, does the Bible mean by 'hell'? Surely not a locatable underworld with its hierarchical order of powers. It means, primarily, separation from God, abandonment by God. Quite legitimately,

⁸⁵ Pannenberg describes Luther's interpretation as follows – "Luther's interpretation was essentially correct when he saw it as the crucified Jesus' agony of conscience, the mental anguish which the proclaimer of the nearness of God must have experienced, knowing himself bound in conscience by that God to the authority of the Jewish tradition from which he had been excluded." – Pannenberg, *op.cit.*, 91.

⁸⁶ Lochman, J.M. *The Faith We Confess*, (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1982), 144.

⁸⁷ Luther, M., *Sermon on Ephesians: 8-10*, quoted in Lewis, A.E., *Between Cross and Resurrection*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2001), 38n.42.

⁸⁸ Lewis, *ibid.*, 39, n.42.

⁸⁹ Moltmann, J., *The Way of Jesus Christ*, (London: SCM, 1989), 191.

⁹⁰ Calvin, J., *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 11.16.10; see also 11.16. 8-12. quoted in McNeill J.T., trans. Battles F.L., *Institutes*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960).

Calvin interprets the words ‘descended to hell’ in the light of Jesus’ cry of dereliction from the Cross: “My God, my God why hast thou forsaken me?” (St Mark 15:34). Hell is the experience of the crucified Christ that lies behind these words. Lochman points out, that, not only physically but also spiritually, the Son of God was mortally wounded by the sting of death. Here, in the descent to hell, Anselm’s dictum finds its most poignant expression – “You have not yet considered the full weight of sin” For Christ to have endured merely physical death would not have satisfied God’s righteous judgment. Christ, as God’s perfect sacrifice for human sin, had to partake of the full weight of God’s divine vengeance. It was therefore necessary for him to visit hell, “to engage, at close quarters, the powers of hell, and the horrors of eternal death.” This meant that, as Calvin put it – “He endured the death which is inflicted on the wicked by an angry God”⁹¹. Thus Christ bore on his soul the torture of condemned and ruined man.⁹²

For Calvin, then, the descent is the assumption of judgment which happens for us. For him, the god-forsakenness of the one in whom God acts, in our place, is the descent. But he also maintained that Christ illuminated the souls which were waiting for him. A few of the Reformed, such as Zwingli, Bucer and Beza, understood ‘hell’ as the grave, but most of them tended to follow Calvin – especially in the Heidelberg Catechism:

Q. Why is there added, “He descended into hell”?

A. That in my severest tribulations, I may be assured that Christ my Lord has redeemed me from hellish anxieties and torments by the unspeakable anguish, pains and terrors which he suffered in his soul both on the Cross and before.⁹³

Lewis strongly asserts that the resurrection should not be permitted to verge upon the Cross. He notes that it is typical of the Reformed Confessions that the Westminster Shorter Catechism emphasises the humiliation of Christ from his birth, leading to the crucifixion, and consisting finally in his “being buried and continuing under the power of death for a time.”⁹⁴

The Larger Catechism mentions the article in the Apostles’ Creed in A50:

Christ’s humiliation after his death consisted in his being buried, and continuing in the state of the dead till the third day, which hath been expressed in these words: ‘He descended into hell’.

⁹¹ Calvin, J., *Institutes*, 2.16.10.

⁹²

⁹³ *The Heidelberg Catechism*, 46.

⁹⁴ Lewis, op.cit., 39 n.42.

(d) The Descent in Modern Theology

Attention must now be paid to the descent in modern theology. There is general agreement on the mythological character of the doctrine. As Hanson notes, the various mythical elements were inherited by the New Testament from first century Judaism. The writers of the New Testament then used them when stating their doctrine. They include, "the land of the dead, the waters of chaos, the spirits in prison, and the triumph over the infernal powers."⁹⁵

The description of the descent in scripture, and indeed right down to the modern era implies an outdated cosmology, according to which there was a three-tier universe, including an underworld as the abode of the dead (although von Balthasar, as already noted above, had reservations about this). It was certainly never a scientifically proved description, and must therefore, from the beginning, have been an imaginative portrayal. It concerns what transcends our understanding, but it can be approached indirectly through the imagination, as Lewis observes.⁹⁶ It therefore almost goes without saying that the descent is not to be understood as a historical event, but is a symbolical expression of the universal significance of Jesus' vicarious death.

Before exploring this meaning further, however, reference must be made to what is regarded as one of the most difficult philosophical problems in eschatology – the problem of time. Lewis refers here to "naïve conceptions of time and eternity"⁹⁷. Hanhart, for his part, rejects Cullmann's "purely temporal interpretation of the two-aeon eschatology." While it is true that God's redemptive act in Christ has to be described in terms of time and space, Hanhart believes that "these terms point to that which is beyond the spatio-temporal", and so it is not acceptable to say that the dead must be 'waiting in time'.⁹⁸

As it is true that the descent does not belong to our calculable history, and because the concepts of time taken from our world may no longer be valid, we cannot determine in temporal terms, the taking on of the experience of Sheol by the Redeemer (nor, consequently, the waiting of the unredeemed for him). We obviously do not have intellectual tools sufficiently adequate to handle these concepts, and the mythological

⁹⁵ Hanson, *op.cit.*, 155.

⁹⁶ Lewis, *op.cit.* 39 n.43. – "Myth", observes Lewis, "on this view, is the imaginative use of symbol and parable, of the poetic and the pictorial, to express the inexpressible. Far from being false, it is the only way to come to what is ultimately true".

⁹⁷ Lewis, *op.cit.* 39 n.43.

⁹⁸ Hanhart, *op.cit.*, 238.

character of the descent is shrouded in a certain mystery. Moltmann's treatment of the problem is possibly the most satisfying spiritually, when he observes that the dead no longer belong to the sphere of the kind of linear time we have on earth. He suggests, however, that if we understand time relationally as God's time for creation, then the dead "have time in Christ because Christ has time for them."⁹⁹ He makes the point on the basis of 1 Peter 3:19 and 4:6. Both Moltmann and Macquarrie use the phrase "the fullness of time" with reference to God's time. God must have a freedom from time and for time, beyond our imagining.

The central significance of the descent varies between its association either with the Cross or with the resurrection. One of the principal concerns of Lewis in his study of Easter Saturday is to prevent us failing to appreciate the horror and god-forsakenness of Jesus in Hades, because we are anticipating the victory and glorification of the resurrection. The wonder of God's raising of his Son can only be fully appreciated after contemplation of God in the grave.

Theologians appear to line up on one side or the other, associating Easter Saturday either predominantly with our Lord's humiliation, or with his exaltation. Von Balthasar clearly sides with the former party,¹⁰⁰ and refers to the change which then takes place in the meaning of death for us. We can now see in death the love which gives itself unreservedly into the hands of God. It is then not merely an atonement for everything that we failed to do, but, beyond that, an earning of grace for others, to abandon their egoism, and choose love as their innermost disposition. This is a valuable comment as it brings an article in the Creed, which might seem extremely remote from our experience, right down into our own mortal lives. Another Roman Catholic theologian, Schillebeeckx, takes a similar line, emphasising that Jesus' descent into hell must be seen as part of his death and not of his resurrection¹⁰¹. Du-Toit holds a similar view that the descent is not a new aspect which comes after death; it simply is the implication of death itself.¹⁰² Barth, following Calvin, also stresses the verdict of judgment which God carries out, in that he himself in Jesus Christ takes the place of the condemned man and suffers what man had to suffer.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ Moltmann, op.cit., 105.

¹⁰⁰ Von Balthasar, H.U., *Credo: Meditations on the Apostles' Creed*, (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1989), 53 – comments: "It was as a humanly dead man that the Son descended to the dead, and not as a victorious living one with an Easter banner, such as is depicted on Eastern icons through an anticipatory projection of the resurrection on to Holy Saturday."

¹⁰¹ Schillebeeckx, E., *Christ: The Christian Experience in the Modern World*, (London: SCM, 1977),

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¹⁰² Du-Toit op.cit., 77.

¹⁰³ Barth, K. *Dogmatics in Outline*, (London: SCM., 1947), 118.

Brunner goes even further. It is not simply that Christ suffers the penal death which we deserve – but also, this penal death in despair, in complete separation from God, in hell. Hell is unconditional despair, and we do not have to suffer it in its completeness, because of what Christ has suffered and done for us¹⁰⁴.

This leads on to reflection upon the vicarious nature of Christ's suffering, and his solidarity with the dead. Through this solidarity, Christ avails himself of his salvific possibilities for them, and thus brings the dead hope. This solidarity with the condition of the dead would be the prior condition for the work of redemption. Von Balthasar understands the 'preaching' of 1 Peter 3:19 as the publication of the redemption actively suffered and brought about by the Cross of the living Jesus – and not as a new activity, distinct from the first. The actively formulated term, 'preaching', is therefore to be conceived as the efficacious outworking in the world beyond, of what was accomplished in the temporality of history¹⁰⁵. This is very much the central theme of this thesis which conceives of the redemptive activity of Christ (the 'preaching') occurring for the unevangelised in the intermediate state..

Interestingly enough, Lewis points to the alleged problem of the retroactive validity of Christ's death as being caused partly "by neglect of the vicarious nature of our Lord's humanity"¹⁰⁶. Is he implying that, if the early Christians had properly understood the eternal application of the redemption wrought on Calvary, there would have been no need to include the descent into hell, in the Creed?

Another group of theologians associate the descent with the resurrection. Weber, for example, observes that, seen in terms of the Creed, "descended into hell" is clearly meant eschatologically, referring to the "new creation", and connected to the resurrection. Nowhere, he says, is it an issue of what has happened within the "history of death". The centre of that history is the Easter event.¹⁰⁷ If this were to be true it would have little relevance to the final destiny of the unevangelised, as the 'new creation' would occur in heaven, and not in an intermediate state.

The preaching to the dead, with the gospel of salvation, as recorded in 1 Peter, certainly seems to be consistent with the energies and redemptive spirit of the Risen Christ, enabling the dead to enter upon an experience of purification, and greater knowledge, and preparing their souls for ultimate entrance to heaven and the Beatific

¹⁰⁴ Brunner, E., *I Believe in the Living God*, (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 81-82.

¹⁰⁵ Von Balthasar, H.U. *Mysterium Paschale*, 150.

¹⁰⁶ Lewis, op.cit., 39 n.43.

¹⁰⁷ Weber, O., *Foundations of Dogmatics*, (vol.2), (Grand Rapids, Michigan:Eerdmans, 1962), 104.

Vision. Gregersen believes that the preaching to the dead may indicate the persistence of God in seeking to overcome the stubbornness of human wills which are preventing “a final transformation of selfhood.”¹⁰⁸ This persistence, one imagines, would continue throughout the intermediate state, as long as there was a spark of the divine left in human souls.

These ideas almost introduce some kind of purgatory, where the dead are cleansed until they are acceptable to God. If, however, the exaltation of Christ is emphasised at the expense of his humiliation, there is a danger of losing the redemptive value of his solidarity with sinners, with the vicarious bearing of judgment on human sin, and the dereliction and god-forsakenness of the crucified God. It is surely the fact that Christ underwent the depths of degradation, drinking the cup of human shame and ignominy to the very dregs, that effects our redemption.

The problem is where to put the emphasis – on Christ’s humiliation or on his exaltation. Von Balthasar tends to emphasise Christ’s solidarity with the dead, his sense of forsakenness and abandonment by the Father, and his sharing of the weakness of sinners (the *refa'im*) in Sheol. How appropriate is it to use the word ‘triumph’ of Christ’s going to the dead? Von Balthasar does use that word, but in a carefully restricted sense. He does not triumph over the ‘powers of hell’ in the sense of subjecting them to him, because that would only be possible through new life and strength. The only triumph he contemplates is his own, but not “in the shining forth of the life of the Resurrection” because then he would lose “a point of contact with this chaos.”¹⁰⁹ Von Balthasar cannot really be suspected of undermining the seeming finality of the death of Christ, because he describes the descent as that of a humanly dead man, rather than as that of “a victorious living one with an Easter banner.”¹¹⁰ This, incidentally, would seem to disarm the objection of interpreters of 1 Pet. 3:19 who maintain that Christ visited the realm of the dead in order to proclaim his victory. Von Balthasar pictures Christ crossing the deepest hell, since he is not bound by any of the bonds of sin, but is rather, ‘free among the dead’¹¹¹. In Von Balthasar’s thought, then, the descent is treated as a passage from defeat to victory, a process which

¹⁰⁸ Gregersen, N., “The Final Crucible” in *The Future as God’s Gift*, eds. Fergusson D.A.S., and Sarot M., (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 2000), 175.

¹⁰⁹ Von Balthasar, op.cit., 172-3.

¹¹⁰ Here Von Balthasar is referring to the kind of victorious Christ depicted in Eastern icons through an anticipatory projection of the Resurrection onto Holy Saturday. – Von Balthasar, *Credo: Meditations on the Apostles’ Creed*, (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1989), 53.

¹¹¹ Von Balthasar, H.U., op.cit., 176, where he comments: “Inasmuch as the Son travels across the chaos in virtue of the mission received from the Father, he is, objectively speaking, whilst in the midst of the darkness of what is contrary to God, in ‘paradise’ and the image of triumph may well express this.

generates movement in the intermediate state of the departed. It is an extension of Christ's suffering and death, through which sin is conquered, death is overcome and humanity as a new creation is established.¹¹²

The point is also made clear by Karl Barth who does not regard the descent into hell as victorious, because it describes an action of the risen Christ. He, too, rejects interpretations which suggest that Christ visited the depths of hell for purposes of proclamation, liberation or binding the devil and his demons. For him, as for Von Balthasar, the descent is a victory because Christ's suffering and experience of the abyss into which all humanity is consigned because of sin, eliminates and destroys sin.¹¹³ Barth moves beyond typical Reformed teaching here, regarding the descent as belonging to the *status exaltationis* - the 'states' of Christ being considered, not as successive, but as simultaneous.

Lochman seeks to reconcile the two contrasting emphases, in the context of the opposing understanding of Luther's and Calvin's teachings. He has in mind the ambiguity of the biblical evidence, and so, sees no reason to insist upon one interpretation rather than the other. When one reads Luther, following in the patristic tradition, one is led to appreciate the importance of the descent for a theological understanding of liberation. When one turns to Calvin, it is the terrible estrangement of hell which strikes one as important.¹¹⁴ There is, however, a danger with the Lutheran emphasis, of undermining the finality and reality of Christ's humiliation in the descent to hell, when it sees the descent as the beginning of Christ's triumphal procession. This danger is very marked also in the thought of the Orthodox writer, Georges Florovsky, who argues that Christ descends into hell in glory - "not in humiliation, although through humiliation on the Cross." Florovsky certainly goes too far and undermines the seeming finality of the death of Christ when he says - "the descent into hell (or Hades) is already the resurrection."¹¹⁵ Calvin's emphasis on the descent as being primarily separation from, and abandonment by, God is to be preferred, when he interprets the words 'descended to hell' in the light of Jesus' cry of

¹¹² The sense in which Von Balthasar's understanding of the descent can be described as a triumph is helpfully explained in a recent book by David Lauber - "...Christ's descent into hell involves the pure substantiality of 'hell' which is 'sin in itself' (*Mysterium Paschale*, 173). This is a vision of Christ's triumph, because it is a vision of the reality of sin separated from human beings, which is the result of Jesus Christ's substitutionary and sacrificial death." - Lauber, D., *Barth on the Descent into Hell*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 72.

¹¹³ Barth, K., *Credo: A Presentation of the Chief Problems of Dogmatics with Reference to the Apostles' Creed*, trans. Strathern and McNab, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1936), 88.

¹¹⁴ Lochman, *op.cit.*, 145.

¹¹⁵ Florovsky, G., "Creation and Redemption" vol. 3, in *The Collected Works of George Florovsky*, (Belmont MA.: Nordland Publishing, 1976), 139.

dereliction on the Cross- "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? (Mark 15:34).

Lochman does, however, make an important point in support of the main contention of this thesis when, in considering this article of the Creed, he refers to Christ's work of liberation which it affirms, maintaining that no-one is excluded from or cast beyond, "the pale of his salvation." This means that no person is "so remote from God as to be 'hopeless', irredeemable." Such a view augurs well for the final destiny of the unevangelised.

The scope of the salvation achieved by Christ is immeasurably widened, if the exegesis of such as Best, Cranfield and Hunter is accepted, for they maintain that the descent conserves the truth that it has retrospective power. Those who died earlier can also arrive at faith because Christ has come to them. This is Moltmann's point when he says that the dead have Christ's time, the time of love – "the accepting, transfiguring, rectifying love that leads to eternal life." Moltmann recognises here "a true element in the doctrine of purgatory."¹¹⁶

Theologians, both in the Early Church and in modern times, have been much concerned that those who were geographically or temporally disadvantaged, and therefore, unable to live their lives in conformity with Christ during their time on earth, might be confronted with his offer of salvation in some other form. The Spirit of Christ was in the world long before the birth of Jesus. As St John's Gospel records, the Word of God was lightening every man (St John 1:9). The descent into hell may enshrine the idea that human spirits in other spheres have the revelation of God. Pannenberg shares this concern when he raises the question of whether the nearness of God is limited to those who make a conscious decision to believe in Christ. It could be, in Pannenberg's opinion, that Jesus' descent and preaching to the dead in hell, guarantees "an unconscious participation in salvation by men who never, or only superficially came into contact with the message of Christ."¹¹⁷ The descent assures that salvation is possible for those outside the visible Church.

None of this, however, implies that the dead are finally saved. Moltmann maintains that, though the dead are not lost, they are not finally saved either. Together with the living, they exist in the same common hope and in common danger too.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Moltmann, *op.cit.*, 105.

¹¹⁷ Pannenberg, W., *Jesus, God and Man*, (London: SCM. Press, 1968), 272.

¹¹⁸ Moltmann, *op.cit.*, 106.

This raises the question as to whether the descent supplies us with a hint of universalism. The widening of the scope of salvation in Clement of Alexandria, and the universalist position of Origen in the Early Church have already been noted. Macquarrie believes that the writer of 1 Peter comes close to universalism, because the people of Noah's time were regarded as particularly wicked. If Jesus successfully preached the gospel to them, who could be left out? And if the spirits in prison are fallen angels, then the message is even more universalistic, because it means that even the demons will be saved.¹¹⁹

The descent also raises once again the possibility of a so-called "second chance". Paterson-Smyth is typical of many commentators when he says that the descent does not offer any hope to wicked men who, with full knowledge of Christ, wilfully reject him. It tells of men who have never known him and has hope only of those "who were capable of receiving him"¹²⁰. There is, therefore, nothing here to make light of the responsibilities of this life. This would mean that the preaching to the dead offered a 'first chance', but not a 'second chance'. Barclay, however, in expounding 1 Peter 4:6 says that even though men had been judged by death, the dead still had another chance to grasp the gospel and live in the Spirit of God, and he observes:

In some ways, this is one of the most wonderful verses in the Bible, for it gives us a breathtaking glimpse of nothing less than a gospel of a second chance.¹²¹

It is doubtful if this can really be deduced from the passage. Commentators shy away from what looks like a doctrine of a 'second chance'. For most it would be a 'first chance'. The grace and love of God must have a *modus operandi* beyond death. The doctrine of the "second chance" will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6.

Pannenberg, and a whole host of other theologians including Macquarrie, Lochman and Barclay, base their opinion on the salvation of those '*extra ecclesiam*' on the traditional exegesis of 1 Peter 3:19 and 4:6, as found in scholars such as Cranfield. It has, however, already been noted above that Selwyn, Kelly and Achtemeier support a very different interpretation.

Pinnock – even following the traditional understanding of Cranfield – has to admit that "the scriptural evidence for postmortem encounter is not abundant"¹²². It is far less

¹¹⁹ Macquarrie, J., *Jesus Christ in Modern Thought*, (London: SCM., 1990), 138.

¹²⁰ Paterson-Smyth, op.cit., 63.

¹²¹ Barclay, W., *The Letters of Peter and Jude*, (Edinburgh: Church of Scotland Publications, 1958), 133.

abundant if one departs from Cranfield's view. A number of other scriptural passages could be cited in place of the Petrine passages – such as Romans 14:9; St Matthew 27:52-53; Ephesians 4:9-10, but the principal foundation for a doctrine of postmortem conversion are broader theological principles, governed by scripture. It would appear from Romans 14:7-12, that every human being will be required to face Christ after death. Any hope that the unevangelised would then have of forgiveness and eternal life would depend upon the continuing grace of God towards sinners. There is a case for believing that the *modus operandi* of such grace would apply to the dead as much as to the living. Scripture affirms that God desires the salvation of all, and that everyone should come to the knowledge of the truth. Also, the nature of God as a God of love and mercy remains the same both before and after death.

Traditional theology based on a text like Hebrews 9:27 – “Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment”, has assumed that the fateful decision determining our final destiny has to be taken in this life. Yet, it would appear that a God of love, out of sheer justice, would afford a postmortem opportunity for decision to those unevangelised who had been prevented from such an opportunity to respond to Christ in this life.¹²³

Ward, in attacking (as was noted earlier), the traditional doctrine of purgatory, comments that if growth and purification is possible after death, it is likely that genuine repentance is also possible. He also draws attention to the beliefs of Jews and Moslems, many of whom “assert that hell is not permanent, and that God will finally deliver all from its pains”.¹²⁴

It could, of course, be argued that through Middle Knowledge, God could predict what our choices might have been in this life under counterfactual circumstances, and so arranged the circumstances that opportunity would be given here and now to those who would respond positively, but this is to anticipate the discussion of Middle Knowledge in Chapter 5 below.

Despite, therefore, the ambiguous nature of the scriptural references to Christ's descent into hell, it might still be possible to hold that a grace-filled postmortem

¹²² Pinnock, op.cit., 169.

¹²³ Pinnock expresses the point well in these words -. “The logic behind a postmortem encounter with Christ is simple enough. It rests on the insight that God, since he loves humanity, would not send anyone to hell without first ascertaining what their response would have been to his grace.” – *ibid.*, 168.

¹²⁴ Ward, K., *God, Faith and the New Millennium*, I(Oxford: One World, 1998), 194.

encounter with Christ will enable some, at least, of the unevangelised to receive salvation.

The foregoing study of Christ's descent into hell is of prime importance for the main contention of this thesis. The traditional interpretation of Cranfield, Ward and others is approved. The symbolic understanding of the descent as expressing the retroactive power of Christ's identification with sinners and redemption of sinners, encourages hope for the salvation of those who lived before Christ. The retroactive relevance of Christ's redemptive activity for those who have no faith has also been stressed in the modern period by Newlands, who notes the link "between Jesus and those who have lived and died since the beginning of the human race".¹²⁵ The redemptive efficacy of Christ's death can then be extended to the unevangelised in all ages, as it has eternal significance. The traditional view which locates the descent between Christ's death and resurrection also supports belief in an intermediate state, when the saving encounter between Christ and the unevangelised would take place. The fact that the 'spirits in prison' were the most notorious of sinners also tends towards the ultimate conclusion of this thesis which favours a hopeful universalism.

The thesis must now investigate whether eschatology, both in traditional theology and in modern thought, can support a hopeful outcome for the unevangelised. The particular type of modern theology which will now be studied is opentheism, and the enquiry will examine how it differs, in particular, from traditional views on the doctrine of God, and how this affects the ultimate destiny of the unevangelised.

¹²⁵ Newlands, G., *God in Christian Perspective*, op.cit., 278.

CHAPTER 4

THE FINAL DESTINY OF THE UNEVANGELISED IN OPENTHEISM

A much more positive and hopeful view of the final destiny of the unevangelised becomes possible, because of a relatively recent development in theology centring upon the doctrine of God. This new cluster of ideas has been given several names, such as *free-will theism*, and *creative love theism*, but the one which will be used here is *opentheism*. It is associated particularly with the transatlantic theologians, Clark Pinnock, John Sanders and Greg Boyd, but many of the ideas had already featured in the work of a number of English philosophers and theologians, notably J.R. Lucas, Richard Swinburne and Keith Ward.

It will be instructive, first, to enquire into the sources of opentheist thinking. It must be recognised, at the outset, that the ideas which were beginning to be expressed in opentheist theology, with particular reference to the doctrine of God, from the 1970s onwards were not new. The earliest Christian exponent of ideas which have come to be characteristic of opentheism appears to have been a theologian, named Calcidius, in the fifth century. In a book written against fatalism and determinism, he says that God knows necessary truths necessarily and contingent truths contingently. Opentheism has a number of supporters in early Methodism, prominent among whom in the 18th century are Adam Clarke, a Bible commentator who believed in an open future, and Andrew Ramsay, one of John Wesley's contemporaries. On the American continent there has always been a stream of opentheism running through the Churches of Christ, the Christian Churches and the Disciples of Christ. The most notable representative from these denominations is T.W. Brent (d.1905), who devotes entire chapters in his published work to foreknowledge and predestination, and who takes the biblical texts on divine repentance and change of mind very seriously.

Opentheist views are particularly popular among 19th century Methodists. Mention will be made below of the similarities between much modern Anglican theology and opentheist ideas, and it is interesting to note that some of the concepts used by

scholars such as Lucas and Polkinghorne are to be found earlier in the theologies of Anglicans writing in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Keith Ward, for example, draws attention to the way in which H.H. Farmer and John Oman see God as a person:

an Other who encounters us in a personal way, who has a relationship with us which is one of father (or mother) to child, or lover to beloved.¹

A similar understanding of God as a person rather than an impersonal force is to be found in the Boston ‘personalists’ such as Peter Bertocci, and the Scottish theologians, John and Donald Baillie. God is thought of in Martin Buber’s terms as a ‘Thou’ who relates to an ‘I’ evoking our love and respect. In addition, some Anglicans from Charles Gore onwards speak of a kenosis, a self-emptying of infinite divine qualities by the Word in the acceptance of the infinite limits of the incarnational life of Jesus. Such a view anticipates the position taken, for example, by Polkinghorne in our own day. When H.H. Farmer entitles one of his books *Experience of God* he is defending the conception of a personal relation with God – the kind of interactive relationship between God and his creatures described by modern opentheists. A number of other modern thinkers, not normally described as opentheists, hold similar views – among theologians, Jurgen Moltmann, Paul Fiddes, John Polkinghorne and Keith Ward; and among philosophers, Richard Swinburne, William Hasker, J.R. Lucas, Peter Geach, David Basinger and Peter van Inwagen; among biblical scholars, Terence Freitheim has laid the best scriptural foundation for opentheism.

Despite, however, such widespread support, it would be difficult to identify a cohesive school of opentheism. Leading exponents such as Clark Pinnock and John Sanders appear to have arrived at their theological positions, at least initially, independently of each other, and from different directions. Pinnock recognises an affinity between opentheism and Wesleyan-Arminianism and Eastern Orthodoxy, whereas Sanders traces some of his thinking to Dutch sources – particularly the theology of Vincent Brümmer. Pinnock, as a Baptist, emerges from a clearly evangelical stable, and more recently has gravitated towards pentecostalism. It is, however, from the conservative evangelical wings of the Church that the most strident critical voices have come, as will become evident towards the end of this chapter. The main focus of theological

¹ Ward, K., *God, a Guide for the Perplexed*, (Oxford: One World, 2003), 232.

dissent from opentheism centres upon its belief in God's self-chosen limitation upon the exercise of his omnipotence and omniscience. This has caused considerable unease among many theologians. Questions may therefore be asked about the future of opentheism. Its popularity, so far, has been found mainly in Canada and the United States. The opentheist website reveals that a directory of scholars, pastors and leaders of Church organisations, who are well-disposed towards, and supportive of, opentheism has been opened. At present, 41 names are listed in this directory, and support on the other side of the Atlantic continues to grow. It seems likely that it will become better known and more widely advocated by mainline theologians, both evangelical and liberal, in the United Kingdom also. This thesis accepts the main axioms of opentheism, but with some reservations which will be pointed out below.

Modern opentheism has arisen out of dissatisfaction with, and in reaction to, a tradition of thought, which had become dominant with the theology of Augustine and Aquinas, and which was still prominent in the Reformation theology of Luther and Calvin. It is difficult to attach an accurate name-tag to it, but it is frequently referred to as *classical theism* or *conventional theism*. The main difference between this traditional theology and opentheism concerns the divine attributes.

(a) The Attributes of God in Conventional Theism

The determining influences on the formulation of these attributes are two-fold – classical pagan philosophical concepts and biblical ideas. The Early Church Fathers seek to synthesise these two influences, but concern is now being expressed by opentheists and others that the biblical component is under-emphasised at the expense of too much weight being put on the Greek philosophical notions, partly through the influence of Philo.

At this point it will be useful to give an overall survey of the list of attributes, while noting their indebtedness to pagan philosophy, and indicating where opentheism diverges from the tradition. The attributes of God will be important when considering possibilities for the final destiny of the unevangelised.

The central attribute from which all else is derived, is the idea of divine *perfection*. The traditional view has been that divine perfection means that God is independent of creation. He does not need the universe or the human beings within it, in any respect. The roots of this notion can be found in the Parmenidean idea of the One as a pure, undifferentiated and unchanging unity. More significantly, the idea is characteristic of the thought of Plato² and Aristotle³. It appears as if they conceived the idea from that of human perfection, and deduced its implications. If God is perfect, there can be no possible improvement or potential for change, as any change in God could only be a change for the worse. Thus the notion of God's *immutability* emerges, and applies to every aspect of God's being, for example, his knowledge and power.

The influence of this Greek idea upon Christian thought is clearly evident in the thought, for example, of Anselm. His argument in support of God's immutability states that if a being changes, it must either be changed by something other than itself, or by itself, or by nothing.⁴

By the time of Abelard and Aquinas, the orthodox position has hardened. It is maintained that all change in the person of Christ would have to occur in his human nature alone. Incarnation, therefore, involves no change in God and adds nothing new to him. God is unaffected by the world and change, unaffected even by the death of his Son. The truth of God's immutability had been stated by Augustine in Platonic terms, but Aquinas restates it in terms of Aristotle's contrast between potentiality and act. God, being self-existent, is pure act (*actus purus*); he actualises all his potentialities simultaneously. It follows from this that there is no form or degree of being that he can acquire or lose. Edwards describes Aristotle's position on God's perfection as a "static view." Although God was the ultimate mover of the world, he was himself unmoved.

² See references in Pinnock, C H. (ed.), *The Openness of God* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press 1994), 170.

³ *ibid.*, 170.

⁴ Anselm's thought in the *Monologion* is well expressed by Keith Ward as follows – "If a being is capable of being changed by something other than itself, then it cannot be omnipotent, and must be subject to control or corruption. Further, the being, whatever it is, which changes, must be greater than it, in order to have the power to change it; so God would not be the greatest conceivable being, which is unpalatable. If God is perfect, any change must cause some perfection to cease, or another perfection to come into being; but then he either would have been, or will no longer be, perfect, which is contradictory. Thus God must be immutable." - Ward, K., *Rational Theology and the Creativity of God*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982), 150.

In his unchanging perfection, he was concerned only with his “own unchanging thinking in an unchanging way, but not about the changing world.”⁵

It is interesting to ponder why Greek thought was so attractive to the Church Fathers and to medieval theologians. David Runia suggests that it was partly because of the Platonic emphasis on the immutability of the highest Being. This coincided with Patristic belief in God’s faithfulness and reliability, and their faith that he will not abandon his creatures. It also cohered well with their conviction of his eternity and transcendence.⁶

Conventional theism also maintains that, because God is immutable, he must also be *timeless*. As Aristotle observed:

Time is merely the numbering of before and after in change, so what cannot change cannot be in time

God is timeless, in that there is no before and after for God, only an eternal present. As a direct result of the notions of God as a timeless, wholly immutable being, the traditional belief was that in God there can be no changes of any kind. Even changes in thoughts, wills or emotions are ruled out.⁷

Divine immutability, if true, would mean that God would not react to human behaviour, and that the destiny of the unevangelised would be fixed from all eternity.

This is reinforced by a further important consequence of the mainline classical tradition, the doctrine of *impassibility*. If God were ‘passible’ – and by ‘passible’ is meant that God is affected by creatures – then it would mean that God would be changeable, and less than self-sufficient. Therefore God cannot be affected or influenced in any way by creatures. This view is connected to the conviction that God is incorporeal, and so he does not have any emotions. It is not surprising that the doctrine of God’s impassibility has occasioned much controversy, because one of its implications is that our prayers cannot affect what God has eternally willed to bring

⁵ Edwards, Rem B., “The Pagan Dogma of the Absolute Unchangeableness of God” in *Religious Studies*, 14 (1978), 309.

⁶ Runia, D.T., *Philo and the Church Fathers*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), 17.

about. Intercessory prayer then becomes a means by which God brings about what he has eternally ordained. Since God is unchanging, and impervious to outside influences, our prayers have no influence on his decisions. As will become evident, this position causes difficulty for classical theists, because they want to be able to say that God does respond to our prayers, which means that they have to find some way of explaining how an immutable, timeless God can respond to a temporal event.

Further vitally important consequences flow from the immutability of God – for example, in relation to providence. As the traditional view of God is that he is sovereign, in total control of all that happens, he exercises what is called *meticulous providence*. This means that he specifically ordains even the details of every event which occurs. His overall control is so complete that everything which happens, happens exactly as he wants it to happen. As his plan comprises everything, this includes evil and suffering. Traditional theologies, therefore, have an awkward problem of theodicy. The best answer they can give to the question why God ordains evil events which cause suffering, is to say that they are justified in the course of bringing about an ultimately good outcome, which at present is hidden from us. – an answer which fails to convince in the light of the widespread occurrence of hideous evil in human history.

Everything is therefore predictable, as the divine will cannot fail or be thwarted. There is no such thing as God taking risks, or being prone to error. This doctrine has repercussions for salvation, and therefore for the final destiny of the unevangelised. God's meticulous providence leads to the doctrines of unconditional election and irresistible grace. There is no input that we humans can contribute to our own salvation, as this would deny the doctrines of divine immutability, impassibility and self-sufficiency. If this view is correct, it must have been God's will that millions should remain unevangelised in this life. The traditional view maintains that God's glory is the ultimate purpose that all creation serves. Yet one fails to understand how millions remaining unevangelised could serve God's purpose of glory. Also, if large numbers are predestined for damnation, as the traditional view of, for example,

⁷ Augustine said – “Only what does not only not change, but also cannot at all change, falls most truly under the category of being.” – *On the Trinity*. 5.2-3.

Augustine and Calvin, proclaims, how could a God love be glorified by the rebellion of sinners and the destruction of the wicked?

Yet another characteristic of conventional theology which has caused endless controversy is God's knowledge of the future. There can be no change in the knowledge of a timeless God from before to after. So, God's omniscience must include exhaustive, definite foreknowledge of future, contingent events, that is, of human actions. The entire future is certain for God. He knows the future as what will actually happen, not what possibly might happen. He has this definite, exhaustive knowledge, because he determines what the future will be. There is no way in which what he might do in the future could affect God's knowledge, because that would infringe his impassibility or self-sufficiency. As Millard Erickson, a conservative theologian adhering to the traditional view has said:

What he has purposed from eternity will surely come to pass. He will not change his mind, nor will he discover hitherto unknown considerations, which will cause him to alter his intentions.⁸

This would mean that there would be no possibility of the unevangelised changing their attitude towards God – for example, coming to faith in him – in the new conditions of an intermediate state. God would know from all eternity how they would respond, and indeed would have predestined their decision, thus depriving them of free-will, reducing them to puppets, and making the whole concept of an intermediate state superfluous. This last point would, of course, be contested by many classical theists who affirm *compatibilistic freedom* for humans, in that they are free, so long as they act upon their desires. This would, however, appear to make little difference in the long run, as God would still be understood to determine human desires. According to this understanding of freedom, God can perfectly guarantee that humans do exactly what he desires in every situation. Further detailed discussion will take place in Chapter 5 under the title – *Divine Sovereignty and Human Freedom*.

Before leaving the classical, conventional viewpoint on the divine attributes, it would be instructive to note some examples of how the Early Church Fathers appropriate,

and introduce into their theologies, the God of the philosophers. Ignatius, for example, describes God as timeless, invisible and impassible.⁹ Though he does allow suffering in Jesus, he does not allow that God, as God, can suffer. Justin Martyr appears to be quite happy to conclude that God is unchangeable, eternal, incomprehensible, impassible, noncorporeal and anonymous.¹⁰ He seeks to combine this with the biblical picture of God as patient, compassionate and loving. Although he declares that there are no passions in God, he believes that God does care for us. God, after all, is ‘not a stone’.¹¹ Tertullian, who seeks to break away from classical pagan ideas in the light of biblical texts, elsewhere, however, writes that God is incapable of suffering – only the humanity of Jesus suffered. God, being eternal, he maintains, must be incapable of change, since a change would imply loss, which would be impossible for a perfect being.¹² ‘Eternity has no time. It is itself all time. It acts; it cannot then suffer’¹³. Origen, follows Clement of Alexandria in believing that God is impassible, immutable, uncreated, simple, all-powerful and all-knowing.¹⁴

The thought of Augustine is most important because of its influence upon later Western theology. The neo-Platonism which he learned from Plotinus, he uses to interpret the Bible.¹⁵ He retains the traditional list of divine attributes, describing God as self-sufficient, impassible, immutable, omniscient, omnipotent, timeless, ineffable and simple.¹⁶

Augustine rejects the universalist tendencies of Clement of Alexandria and Origen. While he believes it to be true that all humans have knowledge of God’s nature through general revelation, he does not consider that this is sufficient for their salvation. For salvation, they must have explicit knowledge of Christ.¹⁷ Augustine

⁸ Erickson, Millard J., *Christian Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1983), 1: 351-54.

⁹ Ignatius, *Epistle to Polycarp*, 3.2 and *Epistle to Ephesians*, 7.2.

¹⁰ Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, 13,61 and *Second Apology*, 6.

¹¹ Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, 28.

¹² Tertullian, *Against Hermogenes*, 12.

¹³ Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, 1.8.

¹⁴ Sanders, J. “Historical Considerations” in Pincock C.H. (ed.), *The Openness of God*, op.cit., 75.

¹⁵ Augustine, *Confessions*, 7.9.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, 7,11; 11.18; 12.15; 13.16; *The Trinity*, 1.1.3; 5.2.3; 4.5-6; 7.5-10; *City of God*, 8.6; 11.10; 22.2.

As Sanders observes: “God’s immutability implies that neither his knowledge, nor his will ever changes. Augustine made God’s immunity to time, change and responsiveness to his creatures, axiomatic for Western theology.” – Sanders, op.cit.,80.

¹⁷ Augustine, *The City of God*, 8.6, 10-12.

concedes that Jews in Old Testament times could be saved through faith in the Saviour who was to come. The rest of humanity, however, did not have the gospel preached to them because God foreknew that they would not believe. They would suffer condemnation. He believes that the whole of humanity deserves to be damned because they participate in the sin of Adam. The elect are delivered from this fate by the grace of God inspiring their faith in Christ. But the majority are left under punishment "in order that it may thus be shown what was due to all."¹⁸

Such a restrictivist view bodes ill for the final destiny of the unevangelised, but could it be, one might wonder, that Augustine's theory could be amended to argue that all, or most, people are elected, thus providing a much better future for the unevangelised? Universal election, however, smacks of God coercing humans into submission, thus overriding libertarian freewill – a cardinal principle of this thesis. It could, of course, occur if God were to nurture the desire for faith in accordance with a compatibilist understanding of human freedom, a position which will be rejected below in Chapter 5. Oliver Crisp describes Augustine's belief that God elects a particular percentage of the population for salvation, rather than a higher number, as arbitrary, and points out that traditional Augustinians simply appeal to the inscrutability of the divine will in fixing the numbers of elect and reprobate.¹⁹ Yet Augustinians would not agree that it is arbitrary, because it manifests God's justice and holiness in the punishment of sin.

Limitations of space prevent a further survey of the traditional theology of the divine attributes, through Aquinas and the medieval period, and then, into the Reformation era of Luther and Calvin. Down through these centuries, a prolonged attempt is made to reconcile Greek philosophical concepts with the God of the Bible. Pinnock, however, maintains that the Hellenic and biblical ideas cannot really be combined. A choice has to be made between philosophical concepts and the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Conventional theism stresses the absoluteness of God, but, in so doing, denies the dynamism of the world.

(b) The Attributes of God in Modern Anglican Theology

¹⁸ *ibid.*, 21.12.

¹⁹ Crisp, O., "Augustinian Universalism," in *The International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 53 (2003), 132.

Before turning to the opentheists' rejection of some conventional beliefs, mention must be made of some Anglican theologians who anticipate opentheist ideas. They reject the strong sense of God's immutability, that is, that he cannot change at all. A consequence of such immutability is that it would appear to rule out God's acting, because, if God acts, he changes from not doing something, to doing it. One way round this difficulty is to assert that God 'from all eternity' intends that certain actions occur, including those of humans. This position, however, Richard Swinburne, for example, regards as unsatisfactory because it would mean that God does not react in personal ways to human behaviour with sympathy or anger, pardon or chastening. For God to interact in these ways with humans, as the God of the Old Testament is said to do, his actions could not be decided in advance. If the course of action of an immutable God had been decided by his past choices, such a God would not be perfectly free.²⁰ This rejection of immutability is a very marked departure from the thought of, for example, Thomas Aquinas. In Thomist theology, perfection cannot embrace change, because that involves becoming worse. Keith Ward points out that the Thomist God must be both immutable and supremely active at the same time.²¹ The immutability of God, Ward also notes, infringes his goodness because that calls for acts of love which change according to circumstances. Rejection of God's immutability, in the thought of Ward, does not mean that God changes as humans do by loss or decay, and, there are respects in which God is changeless, as, for instance, in wisdom and bliss.²² The changeability of God is also asserted by J.R. Lucas, in response to the biblical record, which portrays God as caring and knowing about the world. God also interacts with his creatures through intervention in the world – "doing things, saying things, hearing prayers, and sometimes changing his mind."²³

Another aspect of traditional theism from Augustine to Aquinas, rejected by those Anglican theologians is God's timelessness, a doctrine which is thought to provide an explanation for his being totally immutable. Swinburne regards the doctrine as incoherent. The doctrine implies that God exists at all moments of human time

²⁰ Swinburne, R., *The Coherence of Theism*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 214.

²¹ Ward observes that for God to be both immutable and supremely active at the same time is "a feat beyond even the capacity of omnipotence." – Ward, *op.cit.*, 160-1.

²² Ward, K., "God as Creator" in Vesey G. (ed.), *The Philosophy in Christianity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 118.

simultaneously. This would mean that yesterday, today and tomorrow, because they are simultaneous, would be the same, which is "clearly nonsense."²⁴ A second reason for rejecting God's timelessness, according to Swinburne, is that, if God is doing things, that involves things being true at later or earlier times. The result is that to say that God "brings things about, forgives, punishes, warns etc., ... seems incoherent."²⁵ The personhood of God, by contrast, means that he is temporal, and therefore, in some sense, in time, not outside it.²⁶ The fact that God is not outside the temporal process, is also argued by some modern theologians, other than the Anglicans being considered, notably Tillich and Barth.²⁷ Newlands supplies a particularly attractive solution to the problem when he suggests that God is "both involved in time and beyond time."²⁸

The impassibility of God is also unacceptable to Lucas and Ward. Lucas makes the point that as God is love, he is vulnerable. In contrast to the Aristotelian ideal of a self-sufficient God, the Christian God is highly passible, and was hurt on the Cross.²⁹

The denial by conventional theism that God can be affected in any way by his creatures, and therefore lacks all feeling, would not appear to Ward to be a symptom of perfection. Ward cannot conceive of a perfect being who is unable to appreciate the beauty of his creation, nor take pleasure in well-doing or feel no sorrow at sin. Such a being would lack the intrinsic value of happiness, and so could not be a perfect being. The unsurpassable bliss which a perfect God would have would need to be a happiness which includes and overcomes suffering and sorrow.³⁰

²³ Lucas, J.R., *The Future*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 214.

²⁴ Swinburne, op.cit., 220.

²⁵ *ibid.*, 221.

²⁶ Lucas, op.cit., 213.

²⁷ Tillich claims that only a God who acts and chooses and loves and forgives is the God whom we wish to worship and the pursuit of these activities, since they involve a change of state, means being in time. – Tillich, P., *Systematic Theology*, vol.1, (London: Jas. Nisbet & Co., 1953), 305. The same point is made by Barth who argues also from the Incarnation, for this means that God acts at a particular moment. – Barth, K., *Church Dogmatics*, II,(1) trans. Bromiley G.W., and Torrance, T.F., (London and New York: T. & T. Clark International 1957), 620. The positions of Tillich and Barth are quoted by Swinburne, op.cit., 218.

²⁸ "Compromise suggestions of a God who is both involved in time and beyond time appear more satisfactory, though still including residual mystery... God, it seems to me, is best conceived as both independent of time, and as operating in time." – Newlands, G., *God in Christian Perspective*, op.cit., 89-90.

²⁹ Lucas, op.cit., 232.

³⁰ Ward. *Rational Theology and the Creativity of God*, op.cit., 133, 199.

The theology of Swinburne, Lucas and Ward also anticipates opentheism in its rejection of exhaustive divine foreknowledge and meticulous providence, in favour of libertarian freewill, but this aspect of Anglican theology will receive more detailed consideration in the context of divine sovereignty in Chapter 5. These Anglican insights into the attributes of God are much more conducive to a positive destiny for the unevangelised than an understanding of God as immutable, timeless and impassible.

(c) Opentheist Views on the Attributes of God

The reaction against traditional concepts in the doctrine of God, which is to be found in opentheism, must now be considered. But, first, earlier ideas prevalent in the Early Church Fathers, and acceptable to opentheism, must be studied. Justin Martyr, for example, as was noted above, while holding that God is immutable and impassible, wishes to preserve the biblical concept of God as loving and caring. While he believes that God foreknows all the decisions which humans will make, this does not lead to determinism, because he bases his election on their choices – a view which is closer to Arminianism than to Calvinism, and therefore more congenial to opentheists.³¹ God is held to ‘respond’ to human decisions and so his relationality to humans opens up the possibility of postmortem conversion for the unevangelised in a way which would be impossible for Augustinian predestination, unless those unevangelised were already numbered among the elect. Irenaeus follows Justin in allowing libertarian freewill to humans, and rejects God’s foreordination of human decisions.³²

Tertullian is of the opinion that God can change his mind, and he instances the case of God repenting of his decision to destroy Nineveh.³³ God is responsive to human decisions. Tertullian does not believe that God directs in detail everything that happens, because his gift to humans of freewill means that they can either co-operate with God’s purposes or thwart his will. Tertullian’s theology portrays a God who interacts with his creatures, which is precisely the emphasis of opentheism.

³¹ Justin, *I Apology*, 43-45.

³² Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 4.37.1-2.

³³ Tertullian, *Ad Marcionem*, 2.4.

Anticipation of opentheism is even more marked in Alexandrian theology. As in the thought of Justin, Origen holds that God has foreknowledge of the free choices which humans will make, and, in his providence, plans what his responses are; yet Origen is adamant that God does not cause human decisions.³⁴ One can detect a loosening of Origen's adherence to the classical position on God's impassibility, when he says that God rejoices at human conversion, and feels sorrow for human sin.

It would, therefore, appear that the Early Church Fathers, prior to Augustine, maintain that God freely enters into relationship with humanity, and that the ways in which he responds to his creatures are sometimes conditioned by their actions. While, at least in their language, retaining descriptions of God's attributes from Greek philosophy, they are also anxious to uphold the biblical emphasis on God's love and grace. This is an emphasis which is characteristic of opentheism, so that opentheist rejection applies, not to conventional theism as a whole, but rather to certain aspects of its Augustinian/Calvinist component.

As the name indicates, 'opentheism' portrays God as being 'open' to relationships of love with human beings. He has created us in such a way that we are free to respond to his love or to reject it. It belongs to the essence of love that it does not coerce or manipulate, but seeks a free response. This requires us to believe that the future is not completely settled. Pinnock uses the term 'root metaphor' to describe what God is like. These influential portrayals of God strongly affect how we picture God, and relate to him.³⁵

Theologians of a more conservative kind often picture God as a monarch or judge. Pinnock, however, believes that to describe God as a loving parent, is closer to the biblical model. The text 'God is love' (1 John 4:16) has an important bearing on his theology, and he believes that the love which is central to God's nature, and which governs his relations with human beings, spills over, as it were, from the inter-personal communion of the Trinity. Pinnock finds biblical warrant for the metaphor of God as a 'loving parent' in Jesus' use of the word *Abba* (Mark 14:36), in addressing God, and

³⁴ Origen, *On First Principles*, passim.

³⁵ Pinnock, C.H., in Pinnock, C.H. and Brown D., *Theological Crossfire: An Evangelical/Liberal Dialogue*, (Grand Rapids:Zondervan, 1990), 66

thus expressing God's boundless grace and mercy. He also reminds us of our Lord's Parable of the Prodigal Son (St Luke 15:11-32), in which God as the father has a loving relationship with his two sons who enjoy real freedom.³⁶ It is not difficult, when we conceive of God as a loving parent, to imagine him welcoming unevangelised prodigals in an intermediate state.

Pinnock's use of the concept of a 'root metaphor', however, has not gone unchallenged. Nathan MacDonald, for example, believes that it runs counter to the direction of much current Old Testament theology,³⁷ He points to the wide range of metaphors for God in the Old Testament, and believes that it is wrong to give one dominance, and redefine all other metaphors in the light of it.³⁸ The holiness of God, for example, is avoided by Pinnock. Yet it is hard not to accept that Pinnock is right in maintaining that the love of God is the most influential concept in the New Testament. It is, after all, the driving force behind the incarnation and crucifixion of Christ.

Pinnock believes that there is a static quality about the traditional picture of God. He rejects, for example, Aquinas's metaphor of God as a pillar around which everything else moves, or Calvin's picture of him as (in Pinnock's words), "an all-controlling despot who can tolerate no resistance."³⁹

The ordinary Christian believer with no pretension to theological sophistication will find opentheism's concept of a God who has reciprocal relations with humans very meaningful (and, indeed, biblical). Furthermore, to view prayer as simply a means which God uses to conform us to his preordained purposes, will appear to the average Christian to be a serious impoverishment of prayer as it is envisaged in the Bible.

Conservative theologians tend to defend their position by treating many of the biblical metaphors for God as anthropomorphisms, or as accommodations, God 'lipping' as Calvin said to human weakness. They perceive a danger in our making God in our own image. This, however, is not necessarily the case, and biblical anthropomorphisms may still do justice to the nature of God in himself. The question at issue, as David Cook points out, is how we come to understand personal love. Do

³⁶ Pinnock, C.H., *Most Moved Mover*, 3.

³⁷ MacDonald N., *op.cit.*, 47.

³⁸ *ibid.*, 47.

we try to apply our understanding of human love to the divine, or do we begin from the unique nature of God's love?⁴⁰ The second alternative seems infinitely preferable.

Many consequences follow from the idea of a God who experiences our love, or lack of it, in dynamic, mutual relationships. Opentheists believe, for example, that he cannot be timeless and immutable as the traditional concept entails. For opentheists, God is everlasting. He experiences duration in ongoing relationships with his creatures. They would say that he cannot be timeless, because of the reciprocal give and take between God and humans in history. This point, however, is debatable, and will be explored in detail in below.

In particular, God's potential for change in some respects, is important. Opentheists believe that if God were totally immutable, and unable, or unwilling, to change the details of his plans in response to human actions and prayers, then he would, in fact, be less than perfect. Indeed, a God who, while his divine nature remains immutable, changes his thoughts, will and emotions, appears to be omniscient, adept in resourcefulness and superior, compared to a God who is eternally locked in a pre-ordained will and course of action.

The opentheist position on the notion of impassibility is that God can be influenced and affected by our actions as well as by our prayers, but it is because he voluntarily chooses to enter into relationships with humans, that he is passible.

Conservative upholders of the traditional doctrine of the impassibility of God once again have to resort to maintaining that the Bible, when speaking of divine wrath, anger, love and mercy, must not be taken literally. Many would claim that it detracts from God's otherness and majesty to ascribe human characteristics to deity. Yet, if we dismiss such descriptions of God, we lose much of the Bible, and are in danger of misunderstanding the nature of God. The problem reaches critical proportions in

³⁹ Pinnock, C.H., *Most Moved Mover*, op.cit., 3.

⁴⁰ Cook, D., "Weak Church, Weak God," in Cameron, N.M de S., (ed.), *The Power and Weakness of God*, (Edinburgh: Rutherford House Books, 1989), 77.

relation to the incarnation. where, as Sanders observes, the ascription of human characteristics to God does not seem to be a matter of concern to him.⁴¹

Many books have been written on the subject of divine suffering, and, the balance of modern scholarship has swung away from divine impassibility, and much more in the direction of opentheist views.

A further consequence of opentheism is that the freedom which opentheists believe God's creatures have been given to accept or reject his initiatives, presents a strong challenge to traditional views on God's sovereignty. As has already been indicated, 'classical' theology teaches that God wills and determines everything that happens in the world. In such a case, postmortem conversions would be impossible unless ordained beforehand by God, and even that would not occur, according to Calvinism because fateful decisions regarding final destiny must be made before death.⁴²

The openness model, however, conceives of a God who takes risks, as the title of John Sanders' principal book indicates.⁴³ The risk is that God's desires may be thwarted in some cases – we do not always do what God desires. Opponents hold that such a belief destroys confidence in God's sovereignty – how can he remain in control if he has delegated so much responsibility to fallible mortals? Nevertheless, opentheists maintain that he still retains ultimate sovereignty, because when his plan A is opposed by human sinfulness, such is his competence, that he can adapt and bring into operation plan B, enabling him to achieve his ultimate goals. Such a view of providence is well-supported by the biblical evidence. An outstanding example is the familiar Old Testament story of how Joseph revealed his identity in Egypt to the brothers who had sold him into slavery, reassuring them with the words:

But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So, then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. (Genesis 45:7-8).

⁴¹ Sanders, J., *The God Who Risks*, (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 21.

⁴² As Calvin observes – "Whatever happens in the universe is governed by God's incomprehensible plans (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.17.2) God regulates all things according to his secret plan which depends solely upon itself." (ibid., 3.23.7).

⁴³ Sanders J., *The God Who Risks*.

According to Calvinist theology, the whole saga was predetermined by God, but if, with opentheism, we grant libertarian freedom to the brothers, then, once they had sinned against God by their callous act towards Joseph, God was able to use their perfidy in the working out of his ultimate purpose.⁴⁴ The same working out of providence can, of course, be seen in the crucifixion of Christ. As St Paul expressed it:

And we know that in all things, God works for the good of those who love him. (Romans 8:28).

Surely, “in all things” might be understood to include postmortem circumstances, where God’s providence would also be operative. The particular view of providence taken by opentheists has been described as *General Providence* as opposed to the *Meticulous Providence* of conventional theism. God has chosen not to control tightly every detail of what happens, and so at times he allows the sinful actions of men and women which are contrary to his will for us. Sometimes it is true that God alone decides what will happen, but more usually, in allowing humans freedom of action, he initiates and invites our co-operation. This notion of sovereignty has been described as persuasion, rather than coercion or domination.

Opentheism involves a limitation on God’s knowledge of the future, and this possibly marks its greatest divergence from the conventional view, and has occasioned the strongest opposition from neo-Calvinists. Since humans co-operate with God in the working out of his plans, the future is not a prearranged blueprint. Instead, for both God and his creatures, it is partly open rather than completely settled and certain. The opentheist position that God is open to the future is sometimes called *presentism*. According to this view, God has complete knowledge of past and present, but not of the future. The opentheist understanding of God’s omniscience also means that God knows those aspects of the future that are determined to occur (such as those that God has unilaterally ordained to come to pass). As far as future human free choices are concerned, God knows them as possibilities rather than as certainties. God knows the range of possible choices available to us, and, because of his intimate knowledge of our past behaviour, and also of our inner inclinations, he is able to estimate the

⁴⁴ Pinnock uses another biblical illustration to make this point, recalling that when God cannot persuade Moses to accept the call, he resorts to an alternative plan, calling Aaron into the picture. – Pinnock, C.H., *The Openness of God*, op.cit., 116.

likelihood of each possible choice. Thus opentheists assert that God is omniscient, in that he knows all that can be known, and has complete foreknowledge of all fixed truths. In this matter, opentheism is, of course, sharply opposed to Calvinism which propounds God's exhaustive foreknowledge of the future. His omniscience is the direct consequence of his foreordination of everything that happens or will happen.

Opentheism is closer to Arminianism, but differs significantly from classic Arminianism as held, for instance, by Wesley. Wesley and Arminius hold to the traditional definitions of unchangeability, eternity and omniscience. They believe in *simple foreknowledge*. According to simple foreknowledge, God previsions all future contingent events, and so knows what definitely will happen, not merely what might happen. This is an important step forward from Calvinism, because it allows human beings libertarian freedom of will, and therefore an ability, with the help of prevenient grace, to participate in their own salvation, whereas Calvinism states that the destiny of humans is preordained. Opentheists, however, go beyond classical Arminianism, which they think puts real interaction between God and human beings into danger.

The openness model, in advocating a limitation of God's knowledge of the future, echoes the views of other contemporary theologians, not normally included in the openness category. Jurgen Moltmann speaks of the divine self-limitation or kenosis, whereby God freely chooses to allow the world to impact him without, however, losing his lordship over it.⁴⁵ Keith Ward is another who expresses a similar view.⁴⁶

It will be clear from this survey and comparison of conventional theism with opentheism, that openness views are much more favourable towards the destiny of the unevangelised. If orthodox Augustinian/Calvinism is correct, then the fate of the unevangelised is predetermined, and cannot be changed either before or after death. If, on the other hand, human beings have freedom to make their input into their ultimate destiny, the defining character of that input – whether it be in accordance with a 'faith-principle' inclusivism before death, or through a postmortem encounter with Christ, is worthy of closer examination. Before, however, a conclusion can be reached, further consideration in greater detail will be given to those attributes of God which continue

⁴⁵ See Bauckham, R., *The Theology of Jurgen Moltmann*, (Edinburgh: T.& T. Clark, 1995), 15-17.

to be the source of controversy between conservative and opentheist theologians. It will also be necessary to explore in greater depth, the Augustinian/Calvinist doctrine of double predestination, and how theology has regarded it. Attention must now be paid to the basic axioms of opentheism, and how they relate to the final destiny of the unevangelised.

(d) Basic Axioms of Opentheism

The first basic axiom is God's universal salvific will. The universality of God's plan of salvation is already plain in the Old Testament, as far back as Abraham's call. God calls Abraham and his seed after him to be a special nation. He is chosen not for his own sake, but for the sake of the world. The election of Israel is a corporate call to service as Isaiah makes clear – "I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth." (Is.49:6). God is also concerned with nations beyond Israel, as he interacts with pagan believers such as Abel, Enoch, Daniel and Noah. (Gen.9:17). The call of Abraham implements the promise to Noah. Another godly man of the covenant is Melchizedek, a Canaanite priest of a god called El Elyon, God Most High. (Gen.14:17-24). Abraham receives a blessing from this pagan priest, and gives a tithe in return. God's global reach of salvation is obvious in the prophetic literature of the Old Testament, and also in the Psalms (e.g. Ps.102:15,22).

God's universal plan of salvation is also central to Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God. Jesus makes it very clear that Gentiles are included as well as Jews, and that all nations will have a share in God's salvation. St Luke's Gospel, in particular, affirms that no group or nation has a favoured position in relation to salvation, and that God is bringing his blessings to all people on earth. In the epistles, Jesus is depicted as providing redemption for the sins of the entire human race. (Col.1:13-14; Heb.1: 3; 1 John 2:2; 2 Pet.3:9). Jesus is the Saviour of the world. (1 Tim.4:10); the one Mediator between God and humanity. (1 Tim.2:4-6), and the one through whom God has reconciled the whole world. (2 Cor.5:18-21). Above all, the all-embracing scope of Christ's redemptive work is clearly expressed in Revelation, when John the Divine

⁴⁶ Ward, K., *Religion and Creation*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 284.

pictures the promised reward, a renewed and transformed world, where God makes all things new (Rev.21:5).

The second basic axiom held by opentheists is the particularity and finality of salvation only in Jesus. John Sanders defines these terms as follows:

The term 'finality' refers to the unsurpassability and normativity of both the work (e.g. atonement), and the revelation of Jesus. The term 'particularity' refers to the fact that the salvation provided by God is available *only* through Jesus. Jesus is *the* Saviour. There are no others.¹

Scriptural witness to Jesus' finality is found, for example, in Heb.1:3, and in Jesus' own words – "He who has seen me has seen the Father." (John 14:9). Throughout the New Testament, the particularity of salvation only through Jesus is plainly evident. It is indeed the uniqueness and finality of Jesus which makes salvation available to everyone. The second axiom identifies the basis of God's generous offer of salvation to all the nations. The way in which the particular and the universal are held together is obvious in such passages as John 3:16-17 and 1 Tim.2:3-6.

The exegesis of such passages by opentheists such as Pinnock and Sanders signals a highly significant departure from the interpretation of Calvin who argues that the verses ostensibly supporting God's universal salvific will do not refer to *all* human beings, but only to those whom God has chosen to save. Terms such as 'world', and 'all' simply refer to the elect and to the fact that God saves from every group or class of human. This is the view which involves the distinctive Calvinist doctrines of predestination and limited atonement, to which opentheists are firmly opposed.

A third basic axiom held by opentheists is the necessity of human free choice. Opentheists believe in libertarian freedom, rather than compatibilism,² and so, this axiom separates their position (as do many of their other beliefs), from the Augustinian/Calvinist tradition, and from Barthian determinism. This axiom will be given detailed discussion in the following chapter.

¹ Sanders, J., *No Other Name*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1992), 26.

² A typical example occurs in W.G. MacDonald's *The Biblical Doctrine of Election* – "In a parable (The Wedding Banquet for the King's Son – Matt.22:8-9) – he (Jesus) illustrated how the choice of one's destiny was one's own to accept or decline." – MacDonald, W.G., "The Biblical Doctrine of Election" in Pinnock C.H. (ed.), *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, op.cit., 212. "Nowhere in all Jesus' parables and teaching does he portray a God-figure who *compels* compliance with his wishes, or overrides individual freedom to force his good will on anybody." – *ibid.*, 213.

The three basic axioms mean that salvation must be universally accessible, and that there requires to be opportunity for all peoples to encounter Jesus Christ, and to respond to him freely. It stands to reason that as God desires the salvation of all, he will make the means of salvation available to all. It would seem unfair that many millions of unreached people would be condemned by a just and loving God, even though they had no chance to hear of Jesus. Opentheists differ as to how this is effected. Broadly speaking, there are two positions. One maintains that people need not be aware that their salvation is in Jesus Christ (inclusivism), and the other, that the opportunity for salvation may be given after physical death, as well as, in some cases, before it. (postmortem evangelism). Some opentheists, as, for example, Clark Pinnock, seek to combine the two views and hold them together. The rest of this chapter will be devoted to the elucidation and critique of these two beliefs.

(e) Inclusivism

By 'inclusivism' opentheists refer to the view upholding Christ as the Saviour of humanity, but also affirming God's saving presence in the wider world, and in other religions. The idea is that each religion can and should be appreciated as the expression of a valid response to God, while conceding that there is much in the beliefs and practices of other religions which would be unacceptable to those practising Christianity. Proponents of inclusivism maintain that some of those who never hear the Gospel may nevertheless attain salvation before they die, if they respond to the revelation they do have. God judges them according to their response to the light they have, not according to the light which did not reach them, and his judgment takes into account what people are conscious of, and what they truly desire. As already indicated, inclusivists affirm the particularity and finality of salvation only in Christ, but deny that knowledge of his work is necessary for salvation. It is possible, that is to say, to receive the gift of salvation without knowing the giver or the precise nature of the gift. God will accept into his kingdom those who repent and trust him, even if they know nothing of Jesus.

Inclusivists cite two types of texts to support their case. The first type deals with God's character and will, and alludes to God's extension of grace to all who believe in him. 1 Tim.4:10 is typical – "we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, especially of believers." This is understood to mean that the living God saves all who believe in him, irrespective of the specific content of saving faith, as long as it is grounded in an essential trust in God. Another popular text for inclusivists is John 1:9, affirming that Jesus is the light that came into the world and enlightens every

man, so that everyone experiences the illumination of the Logos to a greater or lesser degree. They maintain that through the agency of the Holy Spirit, the light of the world is seeking to draw all people to himself. (John 12:32).

The second type of text is concerned with God's attitude toward, and relationships with the Gentiles outside the covenant with Israel. As has already been noted in the texts mentioned above supporting God's universal salvific will, the Old Testament clearly witnesses to the fact that God is concerned with those outside the special covenant with Israel. The same kind of evidence is found in the New Testament when Paul emphatically declares that God is the God of the Gentiles, and not of the Jews only. (Rom.3:29). Gentiles also are frequently lifted up as examples of faith. But the example most frequently quoted by inclusivists is that of the Roman centurion, Cornelius, in Acts 10. Cornelius, in the eyes of both Luther and Calvin³ was a "saved" believer before Peter arrived. He had already been illuminated by the Spirit and sanctified. He had already received the merits of Christ's objective redemption through genuine faith in God. He had always been a person desirous of knowing the truth, and God now made it possible for him, through Peter, to know the fullness of salvation that comes through a personal relationship with Christ. But there are others in whose hearts light has dawned, but who, unlike Cornelius, never receive the greater light, and they are judged on the basis of the knowledge they already have. Paul, for example, in Rom.2:12-16, says that because man is created in God's image, he has God's moral law written on his heart. If he accepts the verdict of guilty handed down by his conscience, then he is ready for an encounter with special revelation. This consideration brings us into the realm of general, as opposed to special revelation.

God, the eternal Son and Logos, upholds all things by his power, and enlightens everyone coming into the world. God the Spirit also proceeds from the Father, and is present in the whole world. He is active in human culture, and in non-Christian religions which reflect, to some degree, general revelation and prevenient grace. God never leaves himself without witness, and reveals himself through the created order, (Acts 14:16-17), which means that people always have divine light to respond to. General revelation also bears witness to God's divinity (Rom.1:20), and glory (Ps.19:1). Paul quotes from Ps.19 in order to confirm the universal extent of God's redemptive grace. (Rom.10:18).

³ Luther, M., *Lectures on Galatians*, vol. 26 of *Luther's Works*. ed. Pelikan J., (St Louis: Concordia Publishing, 1963), 210; and Calvin J., *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.17.4.

If salvation can be enjoyed by non-Christian believers, through general revelation, the question which now arises is – “How is this salvation appropriated by the believer?” In order to find the opentheist answer to this query, we must turn to Pinnock’s “faith principle”. The “faith principle”, Pinnock contends, is what makes salvation accessible outside the Church. He holds that people are saved when they fulfil the condition of Heb.11:6 – “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists, and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.” Pinnock regards all such as “pre-Christian” believers in God, who are already saved by grace through faith. By ‘faith’, Pinnock does not mean that one must confess the name of Jesus to be saved, and he cites the examples of Job, David and babies dying in infancy, to prove his case.⁴ Nor does one have to be conscious of the work of Christ, done on one’s behalf, in order to benefit from that work. 1 Tim.4:10, for example, states – “that we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, and especially of those who believe.” Among those who have defended the “faith principle”, Pinnock lists Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, Zwingli⁵ and John Wesley. Implicitly there, as part of the “faith principle” is the need for repentance at some level. This is particularly necessary as Pinnock concedes religions are often paths to Hell, idols of our creation, and evil deceptions. It is when such believers cast themselves into God’s hands for forgiveness and safe-keeping, and call upon divine mercy, that they are on the road to rescue. They are saved *objectively* on the basis of Christ’s work of atonement; they are saved *subjectively* in that God elicits a faith response to the glimmer of light in general revelation. As they do not know about Christ, their faith is implicit.

Pinnock’s use of the ‘faith principle’ poses the question as to how it might relate to the social and ecclesial dimension of postmortem existence. Much of the discussion about salvation appears to neglect the social aspect, while putting the emphasis upon the salvation of the individual. David Fergusson believes that this may be so, because of “the tendency to consider the immortal soul as the essential person.”⁶ If, as this thesis contends, the personality is recreated in a new ‘spiritual’ body in the intermediate state, and, if there is a transformation of the entire created order, then inter-human relations after death are implied. As relationships here on earth between human beings are often frayed by human sinfulness, such as prejudice, indifference, unforgiveness

⁴ Pinnock, *op.cit.*, 158.

⁵ Zwingli makes the point in these words – “There has not lived a single good man, there has not been a single pious heart or believing soul from the beginning of the world to the end, which you will not see in the presence of God.” The text is in *Zwingli and Bullinger*, trans. Bromiley Geoffrey W., (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953), 275-6.

⁶ Fergusson, D.A.S., “Eschatology” in Gunton, C.E.(ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 237.

and downright selfishness, there requires to be a transformation of these relationships beyond death. This will involve, for example, reconciliation between erstwhile enemies. Even attitudes towards others which have been loving before death could be deepened after it. Fellowship in the intermediate state would be inspired by the Spirit, and would be a vital part of salvation.

To what extent, then, does this slant upon salvation appear in opentheist theology? The most extended treatment would appear to be in *The Biblical Doctrine of Election* by William C. Macdonald. He describes the new community which Christ inaugurated as bringing in the Kingdom of God. It would be 'in Christ', by means of spiritual union with him. (Rom.8:19). Macdonald discerns the "corporate solidarity" principle, particularly in Eph.1:22-23 – where Christ becomes "head over everything for the Church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way." Macdonald makes little explicit reference to the future life, but it is surely implied when he mentions the -

eternal perspective of election that enables us to see that in the New Testament the 'times will have reached their fulfilment – to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. (Eph.1:10).⁷

Macdonald, therefore, points, not only to a social dimension in the corporate solidarity principle, but also to an ecclesial dimension. The social and ecclesial dimension of salvation would, however, appear to be underplayed in the thought of leading opentheists such as Pinnock and Sanders. Pinnock does, nevertheless, acknowledge that "conversion points, then, not only to individual change, but beyond, to the coming transformation of the world," and he sees that "social sanctification and cosmic renewal are ultimately part of God's plan."⁸ Yet, the question must arise as to how Pinnock's 'faith principle' and his inclusivism relate to the corporate salvation of the intermediate state.⁹ Those who, in his view, are saved by their response 'in faith' to such light as they have received, issuing in virtuous life, are on the way to a fuller dimension of salvation beyond death. This will happen only when they encounter Christ for the first time explicitly in the intermediate state, and it will then incorporate them in that fellowship of the Spirit which is the postmortem fulfilment of the Church on earth.

⁷ MacDonald, op.cit., 223.

⁸ Pinnock, C.H., *Flame of Love*, (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 146.

⁹ A clue is given in Pinnock's reference to faith assuming 'corporate form' – "Community is important because God does not want faith to be expressed only in an interior way within the hearts of individual disciples. Human experience itself is social, and faith needs to assume corporate form. It needs to be ecclesial, and to have public attestation." – *ibid.*, 116-7.

It is worth making two further points in connection with the 'faith principle'. Pinnock uses Wesley's concept of "prevenient grace" to describe how believers with a consciousness of sin, respond to the Spirit who draws them to the light.¹⁰ Second, it is not our own righteousness, but that of Christ. As Sanders points out, this righteousness does not depend upon our knowledge, but upon our faith in God "whether that God be known as Creator or as the Incarnate One."¹¹¹²

It is, important to understand that this does not mean that non-Christians may be saved by being good people. Pinnock makes this point by noting, what the Epistle of James teaches that faith without works is dead, and that genuine faith is made visible by works. (James 2:14-26).¹³ What is all-important is the kind of faith which is revealed in kingdom acts, and participation in Christ's loving way of life, manifesting itself in the service of others.

Opentheists, such as Pinnock and Sanders, have been much encouraged by developments in Roman Catholic theology on the final destiny of the unevangelised. Pinnock, for example, links his idea of the Spirit offering prevenient grace to the unevangelised, with the Roman Catholic concept of the "baptism of desire", an idea first propounded in the Middle Ages, given formal ecclesiastical expression by Pius XII in 1949, and picked up again at Vatican II. Here, acts of love and charity demonstrate a desire for Christ which would be sufficient to be saved. Pinnock notes that where there is such a desire for God, there is a "kind of rising to life and dying to self", because the person decides to give himself or herself to God and neighbour. A decision of this kind occurs as an enriching gift of God's grace.¹⁴

¹⁰ Pinnock says – "The Spirit challenges everyone to relate to God by means of his self-disclosure... God is revealed in the beauty and order of the natural world, and is the prevenient grace that benefits every person." and "Spirit prepares the way for Christ by gracing humanity everywhere. Spirit supplies the prevenient grace that benefits every person".- Pinnock, C.H., *ibid.*, 61,63.

¹¹ Sanders J., *What About Those Who Have Never Heard?* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 43.

¹² Although not strictly speaking to be classed as an opentheist, Pannenberg is certainly an inclusivist, and his views ought to be included here, as follows – "In their case, (the unevangelised), what counts is whether their individual conduct actually agrees with the will of God that Jesus proclaimed. The message of Jesus is the norm by which God judges even in the case of those who never met Jesus personally. As the parable of the Sheep and the Goats shows, this means that those who have never known Jesus, but who have done works of love, that are in accord with his message, will in fact participate in the salvation of God's kingdom, and will be pronounced innocent at the judgment of God... Again, all to whom the Beatitudes apply (Matt. 5.3ff.) will have share in the coming salvation, whether or not they ever heard of Jesus in this life." – Pannenberg W., *Systematic Theology*, vol.3 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1991), 615.

¹³ Pinnock, C.H., Response to Part 3 of Gray T. and Sinkinson C., *Reconstructing Theology*, (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2000), 263.

¹⁴ Pinnock, C.H., *op.cit.*, 206.

The Roman Catholic position since Vatican II is as follows:

Those also can attain to everlasting salvation who, through no fault of their own, do not know the gospel of Christ or his Church, yet sincerely seek God, and, moved by grace, strive by their deeds to do his will, as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience. Nor does divine Providence deny the help necessary for salvation to those who, without blame on their part, have not arrived at an explicit knowledge of God, but who strive to live a good life.¹⁵

While considering Roman Catholic theology, attention should be paid to the thought of Karl Rahner, who, although not normally regarded as an open-theist, holds inclusivist views. Rahner's inclusivism arises out of his belief in the principle of universal accessibility. He maintains that throughout the history of the human race, in all times and places, every individual must have the possibility of a genuine relationship with God. This must be true otherwise there could be no effective plan of God for the salvation of humanity¹⁶. Rahner wishes to allow for the possibility that all human beings may be saved by Jesus Christ. His well-known thesis of "anonymous Christians" holds that people may in fact be saved by Jesus though they never realise that fact during their lives. He describes his belief in these words:

Christianity does not simply confront the member of an extra-Christian religion as a mere non-Christian, but as someone who can, and must, be regarded in this or that respect as an "anonymous Christian". It would be wrong to regard the pagan as someone who has not yet been touched in any way by God's grace and truth.¹⁷

"Anonymous Christians," then, already have a measure of grace, and grace is always the grace of God in Christ. This grace is God's self-communication to the human spirit. The recipient has a supernatural capacity of responding to the divine offer, and this response has the nature of an act of faith. The way in which the divine approach reaches the recipient can be through an absolutely binding demand of conscience.¹⁸ As

¹⁵ Abbott, Walter, (ed.), *The Documents of Vatican II*, (New York: American Press, 1966), 35.

¹⁶ "...the individual ought to, and must have the possibility in this life of partaking in a genuine relationship with God, and this at all time and in all situations of the history of the human race. Otherwise, there could be no question of a serious and also actually effective salvific design of God for all men, in all ages and places." – Rahner, K., *Theological Investigations*, 5, 128.

¹⁷ Rahner, K., "Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions", in *Theological Investigations*, 5: 115-34, (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1966), 75.

¹⁸ "The person who accepts a moral demand from his conscience as *absolutely* valid for him, and embraces it as such, in a free act of affirmation – no matter how unreflected – asserts the absolute being of God, whether he knows it, or conceptualises it or not, as the very reason why there can be such a thing as an absolute moral demand at all." – Rahner, K., *Theological Investigations*, 9.153 (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1974), 153.

they follow the dictates of conscience, people are enabled to overcome their egoism, and to love others as themselves. It can also come through an experience of great beauty.¹⁹ These acts of grace and charity proceed from the grace of Christ, without the person knowing him. It is worthy of note that the term “anonymous Christians” includes not only those who are outside the Christian faith and who belong to other religions, but also those who do not believe in God at all. The act of faith in which they respond may not be religious faith in any sense at all. Yet, it is similar to faith, because it occurs at a very deep level of human existence, and calls for trust and risk, openness and love. Rahner believes that such an experience is a genuine encounter with God, the mystery of being, and without it there can be no salvation or fulfilment in life. It could be said that when this encounter takes place, God’s approach happens through Jesus Christ, who is the Mediator between God and man. (1 Tim.2.15). Jesus’s death is the final expression of what God has always been doing in history.

Rahner maintains that God’s presence in the transcendental depths of the religious questings and experiences of all people is expressed in the rituals, ethics, communal structures and world views of various religions, with varying degrees of adequacy. Rahner’s term for this encounter is a “supernatural existential.” Rahner recognises a non-Christian religion as a *lawful* religion (although in different degrees), without thereby denying the error and depravity contained in it²⁰. Such a lawful religion can be a positive means of gaining the right relationship to God, of attaining salvation, a means which is therefore positively included in God’s plan. Rahner’s most fundamental conviction, according to Eamonn Conway²¹ is that those who do not close themselves off to God through an ultimate act of free and personal sin, for which they are culpable, find salvation. Rahner deduces this from the Church’s teaching on God’s universal salvific will, and the Church’s obligation to be optimistic about the effectiveness of this salvific will.²² Rahner’s combination of universal accessibility for salvation with his inclusivism does, however, uncover one of the points on which this thesis would take issue with his theology preferring instead to hold to the universality of a postmortem encounter with Christ. Nevertheless, Rahner believes that from the moment the gospel reaches anonymous Christians and is truly presented to them, the anonymous must become explicit. It must find fulfilment in the Church, since one who thus explicitly accepts Christianity has – to quote Rahner – “a still greater chance of salvation than someone who is merely an anonymous Christian.”²³

¹⁹ Rahner, K., *Theological Investigations*, op.cit., 6. 231-49.

²⁰ Rahner, K., *Theological Investigations*, op.cit., 5. 121.

²¹ Conway, E., *The Anonymous Christian – A Relativised Christianity*, (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1991), 109.

²² Rahner, K., *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1978), 148.

²³ Newbiggin, L., *Signs Amid the Rubble*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2003), 68.

Reservations about Rahner's thesis are recorded below after a more extended critique of the opentheist views on inclusivism.

Weighty arguments have been advanced by conservative theologians against Pinnock's inclusivism. Two recent books represent the kind of opposition which his theology is having to face – *Reconstructing Theology – A Critical Assessment of the Theology of Clark Pinnock* by Tony Gray and Christopher Sinkinson, and *The Possibility of Salvation Among the Unevangelised*, by Daniel Strange. The latter is a particularly thorough and painstaking critique, but considerations of space here, will confine reference to the main points of opposition to Pinnock.

Sinkinson considers Pinnock's theological framework to be seriously faulty, because he empties such terms as 'faith', 'God' and 'salvation' of their scriptural meaning. He believes that the 'faith' which Pinnock finds in non-Christian world religions is "little more than general, moral goodness."²⁴

A weightier objection is that common grace available through general revelation is epistemologically inadequate and cannot be a ground of salvation.

One of the reasons why general revelation is insufficient, in the view of Christopher Partridge, is because, when God personally approaches and encounters all persons, including those in other faiths, the encounter is instantly distorted by sin.²⁵ The natural man, operating in the context of natural religion, and lacking special revelation, is believed by such as Partridge and Bruce Demarest, "to possess a fundamentally false understanding of spiritual truth."²⁶ His critics believe that Pinnock confuses the general and universal operations of the Spirit in creation, and the specific and particular operations of the Spirit in salvation.

Daniel Strange criticises the pneumatological focus of Pinnock's thoughts on salvation, believing that the redemptive work of Christ on the Cross is underplayed.²⁷ Strange cannot understand why the Cross is needed if it is not the source of God's

²⁴ Sinkinson, C., "Clark Pinnock and the World Religions" in *Reconstructing Theology*, op.cit., 182-3.

²⁵ Partridge C., "A Christian Personalist Response to Pinnock's Inclusivism", *ibid.*, 197.

²⁶ Demarest B., *General Revelation: Historical Views and Contemporary Issues*. (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1982), 259.

²⁷ Strange asks – "If God's love is grounded in creation and the presence of the Spirit, then what exactly is the purpose of the incarnation and the atonement? If the Cross is not the source of God's saving grace, then why is it needed?... What are the benefits of Christ to the unevangelised if grace is universally present outside the incarnation and has always been universally present?" – Strange D., "Deciphering the Conundrum of Pneumatological Inclusivism" in *Reconstructing Theology*, op.cit., 248-9.

saving grace, and he asks how Christ can benefit the unevangelised if grace has always been universally present outside the incarnation.

Strange believes that, in Pinnock's thought, saving grace can be seen as divorced from the Cross, rather than flowing from the Cross. This, however, is not necessarily the case, as it is surely true, that where the Spirit is operating, there the Second Person of the Trinity is also active.

Pinnock's attempts to draw a parallel between Old Testament 'pagan saints' and the unevangelised in later eras, also proves to be unacceptable to such as Strange, who maintains that Old Testament figures such as Abel, Enoch and Abraham, belong to the line that was the precursor of Israel and the Church, and were the recipients of special revelation "in embryonic form"²⁸. Strange makes the same point with reference to Cornelius whom Pinnock describes as "the pagan saint *par excellence* of the New Testament, a believer in God before he became a Christian."²⁹ But Strange contends that Cornelius was the recipient of at least some special revelation through his Jewish faith, and an angelic visitation, rather than simply through contact with general revelation.³⁰ The main difference between Pinnock and Strange centres upon Strange's contention that personal confession of Christ is necessary for salvation, a position which he maintains is based upon the New Testament, because the apostles in Acts "constantly preach repentance and forgiveness of sin *in the name of Christ*."³¹

Lesslie Newbigin indicates his opposition to inclusivism in a series of questions put mainly to Rahner, but one of which, in particular, also casts doubt upon Pinnock's view that the Spirit in other religions prepares people for the gospel of Christ which then becomes a kind of fulfilment.³² Rahner also attracts criticism, even from an

²⁸ Strange D., *The Possibility of Salvation Among the Unevangelised*, (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2002), 169.

²⁹ Pinnock, C.H., *Wideness*, op.cit., 165.

³⁰ Strange, op.cit., 195.

³¹ Strange, *ibid.*, This view is also held by Richard R.P., in his book, *The Population of Heaven: A Biblical Response to the Inclusivist Position on Who Will be Saved*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 57-60.

³² Newbigin's questions put to inclusivists such as Rahner, include these: (1) Does Christianity really provide the explicit manifestation of that which is present in a hidden and anonymous form in the non-Christian religions? At many points, Christianity, rather than being "The Crown of Hinduism", contradicts its strongest affirmations, or answers questions which Hinduism does not ask; and this is even more obviously the case with Islam. (2) If the fulfilment model is the true one, why is it that the most devout and truly godly among the non-Christians often oppose the preaching of the Gospel most passionately? (3) Why is it that it is in the religions that we are to find anonymous Christianity? Why not other forms of human society through which we receive the kindness of God? See Newbigin L., op.cit., 70. A similar critique is expressed by Vernon White – "While we may be encouraged to think of Christ's anonymous reconciling activity within non-Christian contexts, it does not follow that the religious truths found within those other religions and ideologies are *ipso facto*, essentially the same as

opentheist like Pinnock, who believes that he goes too far, and further than Vatican II, when he declares that religions like Buddhism can be vehicles of salvation, with good Buddhists being anonymous Christians.³³

Pinnock's own position seems to be that while God can call people to himself, and prepare them for salvation from within other religions, as systems they are not reliable vehicles of salvation.

While the grace of God is assuredly at work in non-Christian religions, this thesis contends that the followers of these religions, when they respond to such light as they have received, are on the right road, heading towards salvation. Di Noia puts forward what would appear to be a preferable alternative to Rahner's view that non-Christians can enjoy a hidden membership in the Christian community.³⁴ Di Noia suggests that the possible salvation of non-Christians should be described as their future or 'prospective' affiliation with the Christian community. He also demurs at the application of the word 'faith' to the dispositions and conduct of the members of other religious communities, and indeed, it does seem strange that a moral act when it is salvific, can have the sufficient character of faith. But, while criticising what Rahner would call an implicit faith in Christ, Di Noia, employing the concept of prospective affiliation to the Christian community for members of non-Christian communities, asserts that these non-Christians could have the opportunity to acknowledge Christ in the future. This view is very much in line with the conclusion of this thesis, which will promote the possibility of postmortem conversion

(f) Postmortem Evangelism

Postmortem or eschatological evangelism is the idea that people will receive an opportunity after death to hear about Christ, and to accept or reject him. Proponents of evangelisation after death agree with restrictivists, over against inclusivists, that explicit knowledge of Christ is necessary for salvation, and that not everyone will be saved. It is not, therefore, a variety of universalism.

those found within historic Christianity; nor that such truths must naturally find their goal and fulfilment in historic Christianity." – White, V., *Atonement and Incarnation*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 23.

³³ "The bishops of Vatican II did not say that Jesus is hidden in the religious history of humanity. These are the idea of theologians like Rahner and others subsequent to the Council, and they represent large steps beyond it that we should not be taking." – Pinnock, *op.cit.*, 108-9.

³⁴ Di Noia, J.A., believes, however, that "the idea that a non-Christian can be covertly Christian tends to lead inevitably to an inappropriate underestimation of the distinctiveness and integrity of the patterns of life fostered by other religious communities in their particular teachings. – Di Noia, J.A., "Implicit Faith, General Revelation and the State of Non-Christians," in *The Thomist*, V, 47 (1983), 211, 237.

The biblical basis for the idea is found in texts which predict Jesus' descent into hell – Matt.12:40 and John 5:25-29. It is also mentioned in Acts 2:24,27,31; Rom.10:7, and perhaps 1 Cor.15:54, but most certainly in Eph.4:8-10. Allusions are also made to the descent in Phil.2:10; Rev.5:13 and 1:18. Prayers for the dead, including those who died in sin were made by the Jews of New Testament times. Some New Testament exegetes, including for example, William Barclay, believe that 2.Tim.1:16-18 contains a reference to praying for the dead: they maintain that the person, for whom Paul prays, Onesiphorus, was dead. Liturgies, containing prayers for the dead, were common over wide areas of the early Church. Leaders of the early Church, such as Ignatius of Antioch, Irenaeus and Tertullian, restricted their prayers for the dead, who benefited from Christ's redemptive work, to the Old Testament patriarchs and prophets. Other theologians of the early Church, notably Clement of Alexandria and Origen, believed that Christ released any who desired salvation from hell, including Gentiles, who had no contact with the Jewish faith, and had no conception of a Messiah. The most important texts for postmortem evangelism are 1 Peter 3:19 and 4:6, to the exegesis of which close attention was paid in Chapter 3 of this thesis. One particular interpretation of these texts which seems especially relevant here is the view – popular in the early Church – that during his descent into hell, Jesus preached the gospel to all present, and then led all who accepted him as Saviour out of that prison. This would strongly underline the universal reach of Christ's redeeming work, and God's desire to make his grace universally accessible. Gabriel Fackre, a leading modern exponent of postmortem evangelism, which he describes as "Divine Perseverance", points out that these texts give us light on the subject because they are "part of the larger sweep of the biblical story," and express God's indefatigable purpose to ensure that "the last and least in time and eternity will not be overlooked or denied access to the saving Word of Jesus Christ."³⁵

Fackre, in promoting "Divine Perseverance", says that the poet Francis Thompson, was right in contending that Christ is the "Hound of Heaven", pursuing us to the end. He goes on to say that God's goodness will not relent in face of the sinful limitations which have restricted the Church's mission in time and space.³⁶

³⁵ Fackre, G., "Divine Perseverance," in Sanders J. (ed.), op.cit., 86.

³⁶ "The goodness of God will not relent in the face of these realities. And the power of God breaks through their limitations. The gates of death as well as the "gates of hell" cannot prevail against the divine perseverance. The powerful love of God assures that the saving word will be proclaimed to those who have not heard it, even beyond the gates of death." – Fackre, G., *ibid.*, 81.

The biblical pattern of God's patient pursuit is taken up by believers in the early centuries. The Church Fathers pay particular attention to texts pointing to an "intermediate state", and the descent of Christ into the realm of the dead – the latter idea subsequently finding its way into the Apostles' Creed.

Fackre draws attention to the importance of postmortem evangelism during the centuries of missionary expansion, and especially in the 19th century. Andover Seminary, where Fackre taught, sent many graduates to the mission fields of the Pacific, Asia and Africa, where they were made aware of the vast numbers who would not hear the gospel. The question was often put to them by converts, concerned about the fate of beloved ancestors, who had died before hearing the Word. The "Andover Theory" was therefore propounded; it was based upon many of the texts mentioned above, which were regarded as validating an eschatological option for those who had not been confronted in this life with Christ. Fackre describes it as a theory of "second probation".

Among the theological issues behind postmortem evangelism is the insufficiency of general revelation. One theologian, who has written in this way, is Donald Bloesch, who claims that to believe that all mankind can become aware of God by the light of nature and conscience is "the basis for the *misunderstanding* of God", nor is it sufficient for salvation.³⁷

The insufficiency of general revelation has also been notably upheld by Lutheran theologians, such as Paul Althaus who says that,

outside of Christ, there is indeed a self-manifestation of God, and therefore knowledge of God, but it does not lead to salvation.³⁸

Allied to this in much Lutheran theology, is the conviction that only an encounter with Jesus Christ can lead to salvation. As God wishes everyone to be saved, it is argued that an opportunity will be provided after death. Prominent among recent Lutheran theologians espousing this doctrine is George Lindbeck. He believes that a primarily futuristic eschatological theory is more congenial to the Protestant tradition. This is due to the Reformation emphasis upon the *fides ex auditu* the faith which comes through hearing the gospel proclamation. (Rom.10:17). This idea assumes that explicit

³⁷ Bloesch, D., *The Future of Evangelical Christianity: A Call for Unity Amid Diversity*, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1983), 121.

³⁸ Althaus, P., cited by Braaten C., in "Lutheran Theology and Religious Pluralism", in *Lutheran World Federation*, 23-24 (Jan. 1988), 118.

faith in Christ is required before men and women are redeemed. If this does not happen in this life, then the beginning of salvation must be thought of as occurring through an encounter with the Risen Lord in or after death. Lindbeck suggests an interim period of darkness for non-Christians when they “are not headed toward either heaven or hell.”³⁹

The conception of postmortem evangelism has also an interesting connection with the heightened awareness of infant mortality which has come about through better communication in the modern world. The Princeton theologians, Charles Hodge and Benjamin Warfield, both of whom hold to predestinarian assumptions, declare that all such progeny are saved “by the unconditional decree of God”.⁴⁰ But this contradicts the beliefs of upholders of postmortem evangelism who believe that no-one is saved without an act of faith, though the opportunity of responding to God’s grace, they maintain, will also be extended after death to infants who die prematurely.

In promoting postmortem evangelism, Fackre criticises some of the views held by inclusivists – notably the “faith principle”. As already indicated earlier, doubt has been expressed about the conception of ‘faith’ held by such as Pinnock and Sanders. Fackre refers to the standard definition of faith in New Testament theology which includes – (a) *notitia*, the knowledge of our minds of Jesus Christ; (b) *assensus*, the assent of our wills to Jesus Christ; (c) *fiducia*, the trust of our hearts in Jesus Christ. Fackre concludes that it is wrong to reduce faith to a “universal faith principle” without knowledge of Christ.⁴¹

The concept of postmortem evangelism presupposes that the after-life provides opportunities for spiritual development. So far, attention has been focused purely on the possibility of the conversion of the unevangelised. The question arises as to the fate of the millions of people who die with characters that are unsettled. It would seem that the vast majority, even of Christians, die with characters which are far from

³⁹ “Perhaps we could say that in terms of the basic New Testament eschatological pictures, the ‘non-Christians (Gentiles) are not headed toward either heaven or hell. They, as yet, have no future. They are still trapped in the past, in the darkness of the old age. Only through the message of the coming kingdom of God’s Messiah, does the new age, the true future of the world, become real for them, and only then, do either redemption or damnation become possible.” – Lindbeck, G., “Unbelievers and the *Sola Christi*,” in Lindbeck, G. (ed.), *The Church in a Postliberal Age*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2002), 80,82.

⁴⁰ Hodge, C., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, (New York: Charles Scribner & Co., 1872), 26-27.

⁴¹ Fackre, G., op.cit., 57. Fackre launches a further salvo against Sanders’ position when he points out that: “Sanders has slipped in through the back door, the necessity of *some* saving knowledge – the knowledge of a personal God. This contradicts the trust-without-knowledge refrain, and also limits salvation to religions that teach belief in a personal God, thereby excluding the hundreds of millions who espouse nontheistic Buddhism, Confucianism and so on. How is this consistent, and how is it ‘inclusivism’?” – Fackre, *ibid.*, 58.

perfect. Few people, even although they have encountered Christ in this life, and have found salvation, die without scope for spiritual improvement. Many a one might have matured into sainthood if they had lived longer. The same is true of someone born into a life of deprivation. If such a person has drifted into a life of crime, that would not necessarily mean rejection of God, for God has not been presented to him in favourable circumstances. In different circumstances such a person could have become a devout believer. One would speculate that God might provide the favourable circumstances beyond death, when he could make a fully decisive response to God.⁴² It would seem quite unjust for such a person to be condemned to hell because he has had to live in unpropitious circumstances beyond his control. He ought to receive as much opportunity for salvation as anyone else has had. In such a postmortem encounter, it would appear that God would not expose the person to such an overpowering sense of his majesty and power that the person's freedom to decide would be overcome. In order to count as genuine acceptance of God's grace and commitment to his will, the person's reaction would require to be made freely out of faith and love. In other words, God could reveal himself only to enable such a free response.

These beliefs have also been held by a number of Anglican theologians who, although not normally considered to be opentheists, hold similar views on eschatology, for example, Richard Swinburne⁴³ and Keith Ward.⁴⁴ The idea of personal fulfilment in

⁴² The point is well made by Jerry Walls as follows – "Further spiritual growth could occur after death, for one whose initial response to grace in this life was negative, but who might have become a saintly person if she had lived longer. The same is true of a person born into a life of deprivation. His life of crime does not constitute a decisive rejection of god in the most favourable circumstances, and, he would, moreover, have become a devout believer in different circumstances. God, we may assume, could bring about the appropriate favourable circumstances during the passage of death, thereby making up for his previous deprivation. Then he could make a fully decisive response to God." – Walls, J., *Hell and the Logic of Damnation*, (London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 90.

⁴³ Swinburne speaks of postmortem spiritual development of those of unsettled character in these terms – "God could allow them, or perhaps, those of them whose will was more settled towards the good, but who remained beset with bad desires, the benefit of doubt, by making them such that they could never lose their good will, but such that the perfecting of character remained in their own hands. In that way, God would, as it were, respect the extent of their prior choice of the good, by giving it permanent significance, but also respect their freedom, by leaving open to them how much they would build upon that choice." – Swinburne R., *Responsibility and Atonement*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 197.

⁴⁴ Ward, perhaps, makes the point most clearly when he says – "In that sense, final salvation comes only after death, in the resurrection life. But there are many paths that will eventually lead to salvation – 'In my Father's house there are many resting-places.' (John 14:2). – for those who continue to trust in the highest insights they have. What this suggests is that there will be the possibility of progress, of learning and growing after death, and before the resurrection kingdom is finally realised. Catholic and Orthodox Christians have long felt that few of us will be ready for the kingdom when we die. There will be much for us to unlearn, before we are ready to live unrestrictedly in the pure love of God. Those who have known something of Christ will learn more of what Christ truly is. We will all learn more of the harm we have done, of selfish desires not yet overcome, and of the depths of love we have not yet begun to explore." – Ward, K., *God, Faith and the New Millennium*, op.cit., 191-2.

Christ in the after-life, for men and women of different faiths is also suggested, from outside the Anglican communion, by the Presbyterian theologian, George Newlands.⁴⁵

It is important to distinguish these ideas from the Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory. This doctrine affirms that believers of basically good will, but imperfect character, will have the opportunity of purification as a temporary punishment in between death and final resurrection. This period can vary in length according to the individual, and can be lessened or hastened by the prayers of the Church. The doctrine does entail that once you get to purgatory, you will eventually, sooner or later, get to heaven. Although it is a state of healing, it is not an opportunity for the unrepentant sinner to turn to God. Karl Rahner describes the punishment of purgatory as medicinal, if the sin is acknowledged, and the consequences accepted and endured to the bitter end.⁴⁶ He describes purgatory frequently as “integration”. The distortion of the individual is the contradiction between how one is intended to be by God, and what one has allowed oneself to become⁴⁷. The integrative nature of purgatory reverses this distortion. But this is possible only for those who have made a decision for God in their lifetime. The decision is described as “the love that is based on faith and hope” – and therefore it is possible that this might include the unthematic decision made by an “anonymous Christian”⁴⁸.

The Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory needs to be extended to embrace the full width of the redeeming love of God, so that, even in hell, the possibility of repentance is not closed, and the hand of God is extended to all who will take it without exception. This raises the difficult question of “the second chance”. Opentheists such as Pinnock and Sanders say that postmortem evangelism is not to be confounded with the doctrine of a second chance. What it affirms is the universality of a first chance.⁴⁹ But it might then be asked who has heard the gospel fully and adequately, and what would qualify a person for postmortem evangelisation. Stephen Davis asserts that it is possible that people who have ‘heard’ the gospel, but have not responded positively to it before death, will respond positively after death.⁵⁰ He contends that only God knows who will receive an opportunity after death to receive Christ.

⁴⁵ “...the uniqueness and finality of Christ is an eschatological affirmation. Though men and women live and die in different faiths, yet they will come, after this life on earth, to see that in eternity Christ is the fullness of the peace of God. This is the position which I myself would favour.” – Newlands, G., *God in Christian Perspective*, op.cit., 187.

⁴⁶ Rahner, K., *Theological Investigations*, 2.196.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, 10, 153.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, 10, 157.

⁴⁹ Sanders, J., op.cit., 192.

⁵⁰ Davis, S., “Universalism, Hell and the Fate of the Ignorant,” in *Modern Theology*, 6 (Jan. 1990), 183-4.

Lurking behind the whole question of postmortem spiritual development is the problem of whether this-worldly categories of time (and, indeed, of space), apply beyond death. This is a profound philosophical problem, and limitations of space will prevent a detailed treatment of it here. If there is to be postmortem spiritual development, as envisaged above, it would seem that temporality must continue after death in an intermediate state. Even Karl Rahner who believes that death is to be seen as a moment in which a person is fixed in a state, either of "entrance into God's presence", or of "closing oneself against" God, is forced to concede that progress of the person to full glorification involves temporal categories.⁵¹ This exposes the real problem of 'eternalist' accounts of immortality. They allow no time for progress in understanding, for the development of potentialities, which may have been frustrated on earth, or for a new and more vivid experience of God than was possible on earth.⁵² It has to be said that Rahner is ambiguous on this subject. The idea of an intermediate state, while not necessarily a false concept in his eyes, is described by him as just an "intellectual framework", which contains, as he puts it, "a little harmless mythology".⁵³ Also, it carries implications about time, which are unwelcome to him. He finds it difficult to understand what time and temporality mean for a departed soul, when, on the one hand, the soul is already with God, but on the other hand, "has to wait for the reassumption of its function towards its own body."⁵⁴

He assumes that a temporal human existence entails human freedom, and that freedom after death threatens his firmly-held belief that a decision for or against God, can only be made in this life. The findings of further research into the decisiveness of death in Rahner's theology will be incorporated in the following chapter of this thesis.

There is a great diversity of opinion among theologians as to whether temporal categories apply after death. Polkinghorne believes that they do, but points out that this view is not the prevalent one. He believes that it belongs essentially to humanity that we are embodied, and are temporal beings, but notes that much eschatological thinking believes otherwise. He mentions Pannenberg as one among others who holds that "temporality is of a piece with the structural sinfulness of time".⁵⁵ The result is that for Pannenberg, there is no fulfilment possible "without an end of time."⁵⁶

⁵¹ Rahner, K., *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, op.cit., 442.

⁵² Ward, K., *Religion and Human Nature*, op.cit., 313.

⁵³ Rahner, K., "The Intermediate State", in *Theological Investigations*, 17. 114, 123.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, 17, 118.

⁵⁵ Pannenberg, W., op.cit., 3.561,587.

⁵⁶ Polkinghorne, J., *The God of Hope and the End of the World*, (London: SPCK., 2002), 117-8.

This, of course, leaves open the question of temporality in an intermediate state which would be before the end of earthly time, but in advance of the final consummation. Moltmann is more favourably disposed towards temporal categories. He uses the concept of “the fullness of times”, which includes the continuation and progressive fulfilment of process, acknowledging that the incompleteness of our present lives,

makes us think of an ongoing history after death with our lives as we have lived them.⁵⁷

Macquarrie has some interesting observations to make on this problem. Even in our experience, he says, we can give some content to the transcending of mere transience, and he makes use of the understanding of time which has emerged in modern science, especially relativity theory.⁵⁸

The concept of postmortem evangelism has been criticised from two main perspectives – first, by restrictivists, and second, by inclusivists. Restrictivists question whether 1 Pet.3:19 and 4:6 in fact contain references to Christ’s descent into hell, and his preaching to sinners. Full consideration has already been given to the exegesis of these passages in Chapter 3 of this thesis. Restrictivists also oppose the idea that the only reason anyone will be condemned to hell is for explicitly rejecting Christ. Louis Berkhof, for example, is of the opinion that because the sinner is by nature guilty of actual sins, as well as of original sin, he is worthy of condemnation. While he writes that rejection of Christ is certainly a great sin, it is nowhere regarded as the only sin that leads to destruction.⁵⁹ Upholders of postmortem evangelism would respond that God does indeed judge us for our sin, but that this judgment occurs in this life, and not at the final judgment, and that at the final judgment, the issue will be our response to Christ.

The most widespread opposition to postmortem evangelism (PME) comes from restrictivists who believe that physical death marks the end of any human opportunity to receive the gift of God’s salvation. The Western Church, after Augustine, - as noted above in the theology of Aquinas – makes this a dogma which is seldom questioned until the 19th century. This is a matter of crucial importance to this thesis, because, if the restrictivists are correct, postmortem conversion of the unevangelised is not possible. The deciding factor hinges, not only on the interpretation of particular texts,

⁵⁷ Moltmann, J., *The Coming of God*, op.cit., 116.

⁵⁸ Macquarrie’s conclusion is – “We can say either that God occupies every point in space-time, or we can say that he is ‘outside’ of the space-time continuum, and perhaps we have even to say both, if he is both immanent and transcendent. What we cannot say is that he is at some particular time here – now and nowhere else – that is excluded by the logic of God-talk, for it could be said only of a particular being, and God is simply Being itself.” – Macquarrie, J., *The Christian Hope*, op.cit., 126.

⁵⁹ Berkhof, L., *Systematic Theology*, op.cit., 693.

but also on what deductions can be legitimately drawn from the nature of God as revealed by scripture.

The scriptural case against PME is set out in detail by Ronald Nash.⁶⁰ He launches an attack on the view of advocates of PME that people are lost because they have rejected Christ. This assumption leads to the conclusion that the unevangelised will, beyond death, be given the opportunity to accept or reject Christ, which they did not receive in this earthly life. Nash argues, as Berkhof does above, that the assumption is false, because people are lost, not because they have rejected Christ, but because they have sinned. (Rom.3:23,10), - an argument advanced centuries before by Augustine. St Paul tells us in these verses that "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Everyone therefore requires the redemption which only Christ can bring. Some receive the offer of redemption in this life, but countless millions require to await a postmortem encounter with Christ, before the chance of redemption comes their way.

Nash then lists a series of texts which, he claims, imply that "physical death marked the boundary of human salvific opportunity." – Matt.7:13-14, 21-23, 24-27; 13:24-30, 36-43, Lk.16:19-31. It could, however, be convincingly argued that these teachings and parables of our Lord do not expressly limit salvation to decisions and actions taken in this life, nor is Nash's argument based on their silence regarding postmortem opportunities convincing. While Jesus's main concern, certainly, is to win men and women to the life of righteousness before death, and to warn them of the consequences of rejection, he makes no mention of the fate of those who lack such an opportunity for decision in this life. Divergent interpretations of scripture are again obvious in relation to Nash's final text – "It is appointed for mortals to die once, and after that the judgment." (Heb.9:27). There is no mention in that text of how long after death, the judgment occurs. An intermediate state could provide the opportunity for PME between the individual's death and the final judgment

Nash quotes from 2 Clement which states that "after we have gone out of the world, no further power of confessing or repenting will there belong to us." (8:3), and avers that this reflects the thought of the early Christians during the Church's first century. This is an assumption advanced without proof. Furthermore, Nash suggests that similar comments are absent from the New Testament – because they are unnecessary, as the prevailing opinion in these communities is that death marks the end of decision regarding final destiny. But it could be that the writer of 2 Clement simply interprets scripture in a restrictivist sense.

⁶⁰ Nash, R.H., "Restrictivism" in Sanders, J. (ed.), op.cit., 132-4.

The PME response to the restrictivist position is based upon the justice and love of God. A just God will ensure that those who, often through no fault of their own, never have the chance of hearing the saving Word and deciding for Christ in their earthly lives, will not be excluded from the possibility of repentance and salvation after death. Very often the reason why they do not hear of Christ in this life is because the Churches fail to reach them with the gospel. God is omnipotent, and therefore it cannot be beyond his power to confront them with the gospel in an intermediate state. From what is known of the love of God revealed in the teaching of Jesus in the parables of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin and the Prodigal Son, and in the lengths to which that love went upon the Cross, it can be safely concluded that death will not obstruct or defeat the patience and persistence of such almighty love. Everything possible will be done by God to save souls in this life or the next.⁶¹

The second source of criticism of postmortem evangelism comes from inclusivists, who maintain that God wants to see a faith response in this life. According to inclusivism, there will be a postmortem encounter with Christ for those who exercised faith in God as he has made himself known to them in this life. But the postmortem encounter will be to confirm their faith and introduce them to the One who saved them. In Pinnock's view, sinners on the other hand, are not likely to respond to God any differently from their response here on earth. While they would have the chance to repent, they would not necessarily desire to do so. But this ignores the very real possibility that the manifestation of God to sinners in postmortem conditions might well be much more vivid and persuasive than here on earth – as St Paul observes – “Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face.” (1Cor.13:12a).⁶²

Pinnock holds that those who trusted God on earth, but without knowing Jesus, will meet the God they love in the fullness of his grace after death. For them a postmortem opportunity is firmly established.

In conclusion, reference should be made to what one might describe as “reverent agnosticism”, on the final destiny of the unevangelised. One who felt this way is C.S. Lewis. He came to feel that we should just recognise our ignorance in this area,

⁶¹ Fackre's response to Nash's restrictivism includes these words – “Divine perseverance means not only a *wideness* to God's mercy, but also a *length* to it. Jesus Christ, breaching the very boundary of death will patiently pursue the last and the least, proclaiming the Word to the unreached.” – Fackre, G., “Response to Nash”, in Saunders J. (ed.), *ibid.*, 153. A similar position is taken by Ward in *Religion and Human Nature*, op.cit., 273.

⁶² Pinnock, C.H., op.cit., 172.

because God has not told us what his arrangements with the unevangelised are. We know, he said, that no-one can be saved apart from Christ, but not that only those who know him explicitly can be saved by him.⁶³ Pinnock is impressed by the wisdom of Lewis's approach because it recognises God's love for all sinners, which guarantees that he will be fair and generous in his actions towards them. Lewis's meaning is "that God had not shut the door to the unevangelised, and neither should we."⁶⁴

A theologian who also holds to a position of reverent agnosticism is Lesslie Newbigin. He responds to the question, - What happens to the non-Christian after death by saying that this is the wrong question, and as long as it remains the central question, we shall never come to the truth. He offers three suggestions as follows:

1. It is a question to which only God has the right answer.
2. By concentrating on what happens to the soul after death, we are dealing only with an abstraction.
- 3..The question starts with the individual, and his or her need...of ultimate happiness, and not with God and his glory.⁶⁵

This point of view is unsatisfactory. It is surely not sufficient to limit the quest for truth to the relations which God has with his creatures in this life. While conceding that the ultimate questions governing human destiny are in the hands of God, and that a certain mystery must surround the inscrutable workings of God's wise providence, the faith with which believers trust God for the destiny which awaits them after death longs for deeper content and greater assurance. In particular, doubts which many entertain about the truth of traditional doctrines of election and predestination could be dispelled by further research. A more hopeful outcome for the destiny of the unevangelised could greatly benefit those who face death with imperfect or non-existent faith, and also their loved ones who are about to be bereaved. These practical implications will be addressed in the final chapter of this thesis. The advantages which they bring far outweigh a position of reverent agnosticism.

The foregoing chapter has demonstrated the relevance and attractions of open-theist views on the interactive relations which God has with his creatures, and his universal desire for their salvation. The conclusion reached so far is that these aspects of the doctrine of God hold out the prospect of postmortem evangelism offering salvation to the unevangelised. The nature of the freedom which humans have to respond to the approach of Christ in the after-life will now be studied in the following chapter.

⁶³ Lewis, C.S., *Mere Christianity*, (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 62.

⁶⁴ Pinnock, C.H., "Why is Jesus the Only Way?" in *Eternity*, vol.27, Dec. 1976, 15.

⁶⁵ Newbigin, L., *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society*, (London: SPCK., 1989), 177.

CHAPTER 5

DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY AND HUMAN FREEDOM

(a) Libertarian Freewill in Opentheism

The context of opentheism, within which attention is being directed in this thesis to the final destiny of the unevangelised, includes as one of its key concepts, libertarian freewill. One of opentheism's foremost critics, John M. Frame, describes it as – "perhaps the central issue in the debate concerning opentheism."¹ In his view, opentheists will only seriously consider those doctrines that are compatible with libertarian freewill.

The concept is referred to by a number of titles. Clark Pinnock uses the term "significant freedom".² Others, for example, the philosopher David Basinger, also refer to it as "freewill theism".³

The definition most frequently quoted is that of William Hasker:

An agent is free with respect to a given action at a given time if at that time it is within the agent's power to perform the action, and also in the agent's power to refrain from the action.⁴

It is sometimes described as an 'incompatibilistic' understanding of freewill, as it is not compatible with determinism. By the phrase 'within one's power', which Hasker uses in his definition, he means that there are no extraneous influences, or internal predispositions which would prevent the agent from exercising the power to perform the action. The decision to act, or to refrain from action, depends solely upon the will of the agent.

Before enquiring into what this concept of freewill entails, it is worth noting its antiquity, and, in particular, its scriptural basis. John Sanders traces it back to Philo,

¹ Frame, J., *No Other God*, (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P.&R. Publishing, 2001), 119.

² Pinnock, Clark, *The Openness of God*, op.cit., 7.

³ Basinger David, *The Case for Freewill Theism*, (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996).

who, in rejecting the determinism of the Stoics, affirms libertarian freedom in human beings, for they can produce events which God did not determine.⁵ Sanders continues to trace the history of the concept in the theology of the Early Church Fathers. Justin Martyr, he notes, addresses the issue of divine foreknowledge and human freedom – a problem which will be discussed, in full, below. Justin regards libertarian freedom as one of the distinctive marks of human beings in God’s creation; and, in particular, it means that in God’s sight, we are morally accountable. Yet, although God foresees which choices humans will make, he does not determine these choices.⁶ Irenaeus also holds to libertarian freedom, rejecting any divine foreordination of human choices.⁷ Tertullian, too, believes that God grants humans freedom, so that they can either share in, or oppose God’s purposes in the world.⁸ Origen follows in the same tradition of thinking, believing as Justin Martyr before him, that God has foreknowledge of human decisions, but that he is not their cause. He does not necessitate what will happen.⁹

It would appear, therefore, that libertarian freedom is well established in early Christian tradition. Is the concept, however, derived from scripture, or does it have some other source? Sanders interprets Genesis 3, the account of the temptation of Adam and Eve, as showing that God’s work and words from the beginning of creation, are open to question, and therefore open to being accepted or rejected. He pictures the interchange between Eve and the serpent as demonstrating that God has created the world in such a way that the divine wisdom can be questioned. While he has so arranged things that there is room for humans to trust him, this means that they can also doubt. His creatures are given by the Creator the ability to challenge his will. His purpose is to seek the highest good of his creatures in such a way that they will freely respond to the overtures of his love.¹⁰

Richard Rice, in the opening chapter of *The Openness of God*, seeks to find biblical support for the whole opentheist position. Biblical quotations, too numerous to mention here, indicate that it lies within God’s purpose to allow humans the freedom

⁴ Hasker, William, “A Philosophical Perspective,” in *The Openness of God*, op.cit., 136-37.

⁵ Sanders, J., “Historical Considerations”, in *The Openness of God*, op.cit., 71.

⁶ Martyr Justin, *First Apology*, 28,43.

⁷ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 4.37.1-2.

⁸ Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, 2.5-6, 23-24.

⁹ Sanders, J., op.cit., 75.

¹⁰ Sanders, J., *The God Who Risks*, op.cit., 47.

to make significant decisions for which they are morally responsible. Large swathes of the Old Testament, in the prophetic books, portray the unfaithfulness of Israel.¹¹ Rice's interpretation of Jeremiah's parable of the potter is particularly instructive, as this is a passage which supporters of God's exhaustive sovereignty interpret very differently.¹² Rice says that the fate of nations does not depend on God alone. God issues threats and warnings, and how humans respond to these, influences the way God decides to act.¹³

The interpretation of Jeremiah 18 by both Rice and Sanders is convincing. The repentance of the nation following upon the warning of God (v.8), while being influenced by this outside agency, (that of God), would appear to be an instance of libertarian freedom; the decision to repent, while within God's overall purposes, is surely the consequence of human wills acting independently. This conclusion, however, is opposed by compatibilist thinking, and will require fuller investigation below.

Examples, mentioned by Rice, from the New Testament, indicate at least significant freedom possessed by humans. These would include the freedom to love God (1 John 4:8), and the acknowledgement that Jesus is the Son of God (1 John 4:9); the Prodigal Son who "came to his senses", and decided to return to his Father's house (St Luke 15:17ff.); human beings setting themselves against God for eternity (St Matthew 21:41-46; Revelation 20:14-15), and Jesus' battles with temptation (St Matthew 4:1-11)¹⁴. Rice concludes his chapter by deducing from these passages that God is active within human history. He carries out his purposes, taking the decisions and actions of

¹¹ e.g. Hosea 2; Jeremiah 3:1-3.

¹² An example of this would be John Frame (op.cit.116), who criticises the opentheist position held by Sanders. Sanders holds that "the potter-clay metaphor must be understood in terms of the give-and-take relationship that God has sovereignly established. It should not be understood as teaching divine control of all things." (op.cit.87). Frame rejects this view in these terms: "However, the potter's total control over the clay is implicit in the metaphor itself and explicit in Romans 9:19-21, where it is the potter's initiative to 'make out of the same lump of clay, some pottery for noble purposes, and some for common use,'"

¹³ Rice, R., "Biblical Support for a New Perspective," in Pinnock, C.H. (ed.), *The Openness of God*, op.cit., 32.

¹⁴ Rice comments: "The biblical references to Jesus' temptations thus indicate that his moral victory was a genuine achievement, not just a foregone conclusion,... This supports the conclusion that the fulfilment of God's plans for humanity generally requires the co-operation of human agents. It is not something that God's will unilaterally brings about." (ibid.44). This appears to be a clear expression of belief in libertarian freedom.

humanity into account. This means that he is flexible in adjusting and changing his plans in response to how humans behave.¹⁵

Two other opentheists who also base their belief in significant human freedom on scripture, are Clark Pinnock and Gregory Boyd. Pinnock, like Rice, emphasises that the nature of God, as scripture reveals him, is personal and loving. Relationships between God and humans have to be freely chosen. While it is true that God takes the initiative in loving us first, he looks for our response. As Pinnock says “God wants us freely to accept his invitation.”¹⁶

This is the scriptural witness of, for example, 1 John 4:19 and 2 Corinthians 1:19. Pinnock also mentions Hebrews 11:2,6,39, where believers are commended for their faith because of freedom.¹⁷

He cogently points out that if they did not possess freedom, their faith being inevitable, they would not be praised for it, nor would sinners be condemned for not exercising faith.

Gregory Boyd’s belief in libertarian freedom is illustrated by his interpretation of Ephesians 1:4:

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.

This is a text which on first sight might appear to support a Calvinist doctrine of the elect! Boyd’s opinion is that “Paul does *not* say that we were *individually* predestined to be ‘in Christ’”. God’s desire is to save everyone (1 Tim.2:4; 2 Pet.3:9), but he has given us freewill, and what Paul says here is that “*whoever chooses* to be in *Christ* is predestined to be holy and blameless.”¹⁸

¹⁵ Rice, *ibid.*, 58.

¹⁶ Pinnock, C.H., *Most Moved Mover*, op.cit., 163.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, 162.

¹⁸ Boyd, G., *God of the Possible*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2001), 46-7. Boyd uses an interesting analogy here, to buttress his interpretation. He asks us to imagine a seminar to which we have been invited, and where we might ask the instructor – “When was it decided (predestined) that we’d watch this video?” Boyd comments: “Note that it was not decided six months ago that you *individually* would watch this video. What was decided was that *anyone who took this seminar* would

Boyd then turns to the Old Testament and points to God's *regret* at making Saul king:

I *regret* that I made Saul king, for he has turned back from following me (1 Samuel 15:10).

This makes Boyd wonder how God could be sorry that he had made Saul king, if he was certain beforehand that Saul would act the way he did.¹⁹

The Lord's uncertainty can be explained by the fact that Saul had libertarian freedom, so that it was possible for him to act wickedly. In the event, he did freely choose wickedness, thus causing the Lord regret at his appointment of Saul as king. A similar implication of libertarian freedom occurs in Isaiah 5, where Boyd draws attention to the Lord's surprise as owner of the vineyard – "he expected it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes." (Isaiah 5:2).²⁰

Boyd again turns to scripture, in order to explain the relationship between grace and freewill. He maintains that scripture clearly teaches that we have to choose between accepting or rejecting God's grace – "I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life." (Deuteronomy 30:19).

With reference to the influence of the Holy Spirit on decision-making, Boyd says that it is clear from scripture that people do in fact sometimes resist the work of the Holy Spirit. (e.g. Isaiah 63:10; Lk. 7:30; Acts 7: 51; Heb. 3:8,15; 4:7), so while the Holy Spirit makes it *possible* for us to believe, he does not make it *impossible not* to believe.²¹

It would appear, therefore, from the foregoing, that opentheists claim that their belief in libertarian freedom is based on scripture.

watch this video. Now that you have chosen to be part of this seminar, what was predestined for the seminar applies to you... This is what Paul meant. Now that you are a believer who is 'in Christ', what was predestined for all who are 'in Christ' is predestined for you."

¹⁹ *ibid.*, 56.

²⁰ *ibid.*, 59.

²¹ *ibid.*, 138.

The relationship between divine sovereignty and omniscience and libertarian freedom in opentheism must be the next subject for study. Sanders describes this relationship in the context of creation. God grants dominion to his creatures as a gift, and looks for mankind to give him service and obedience. In order that this might be possible, God delegates some responsibility to humans and shares some of his power with them. God, in his sovereignty, decides to leave some important matters in human hands. God's creatures become co-creators, collaborating with him in the carrying out of his projects.²²

Pinnock's understanding of divine omnipotence is along similar lines. He believes that omnipotence does not mean the power to determine everything. Human beings can sinfully oppose God's will, and God will not override their freedom by imposing his will upon them. But, in his omnipotence, he has the power to deal with any situation which arises.²³

This view regards God as limiting his own power in order to allow the free co-operation of his creatures. Pinnock regards sovereignty of this kind as more admirable and attractive than that which would exert total control over human beings, and indeed subjugate them to his will.²⁴ This is far removed from a Calvinist doctrine of exhaustive divine sovereignty, but is close to Arminianism. If the word 'risk' is not too anthropomorphic a term to use in description of God's plans, we might call it a 'high-risk' strategy – the risk being that human beings will sometimes thwart his will by sinning. The fact that we do sin, opentheists (though not compatibilists), would regard as evidence that God does not exercise total control over all events in the world. God's willingness to take risks is well expressed by David Basinger in this quotation:

God adopts certain overall strategies – for example, the granting of significant freedom – that create the potential for the occurrence of

²² Sanders, *op.cit.*, 44.

²³ Pinnock, C.H., *The Openness of God*, *op.cit.*, 114.

²⁴ Boyd also considers this view of God's sovereignty to be more admirable when he asks: "Does this view demean God's sovereignty? On the contrary, *it establishes it* ... Why should we consider 'control' the most exalted view of divine sovereignty... God demonstrates divine power when he empowers others to make choices to either enter into a loving relationship with him or not... Most importantly he demonstrated divine power when Christ came to earth, and allowed himself to be crucified for sinners. *This is what it is for God to have power and authority.*" (*op.cit.*, 148-49).

individual instances of evil which are, as such, pure loss and not a means to any greater goods.²⁵

One might imagine that, if humans have freedom to thwart God's will in this way, God's ultimate purposes are left in disarray and impossible of fulfilment. This conclusion, however, Pinnock, for example, would completely reject. He uses the term 'omnipotent' to describe God's ability to deal with whatever circumstances come along. Although he does not cause or control everything, nothing can ultimately defeat his purposes.²⁶ That is to say, there is a flexibility about God's working. When he adjusts his plans, it is because he is responding to human activity. The most important interacting from the divine perspective is that which arises out of love. God, in his love for humanity, looks for the response of love from his creatures. As love cannot be forced, God's sovereignty cannot be one of domineering manipulation, but rather one that seeks to advance his purposes by persuasion.

We turn now to the relationship between opentheist views on libertarian freedom and divine omniscience. Opentheists typically hold a limited view of divine omniscience, as Pinnock notes. After explaining that God knows everything that has existed, everything that now exists and everything that could exist in the future, he describes the limitation by saying that God cannot know beforehand exactly what free agents will do, "even though he may predict it with great accuracy."²⁷

It is obvious that opentheists have to hold such a restricted view of omniscience if they are to preserve libertarian freedom. The fact that God is infinitely resourceful also means that he does not require to have meticulous foreknowledge of the future in every detail. As has already been noted, he adapts his strategy as situations change and develop. Once again Pinnock finds scripture warrant for this position, giving examples of God being in the process of deciding exactly what he will do in matters of detail, as must happen if the future is partly open.²⁸

²⁵ Basinger David, "Middle Knowledge and Divine Control," in *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 30 (1991), 135.

²⁶ Pinnock, C.H., *Most Moved Mover*, op.cit., 94-5.

²⁷ *ibid.*, 100.

²⁸ The biblical texts quoted by Pinnock are: the dialogue between God and Abraham over the fate of Sodom, (Genesis 18); the conversation between God and Moses over what to do with Israel in view of her resistance to grace (Exodus 34), and God asking himself what he is going to do next in Hosea 6:4. (*ibid.*, 102.)

Critics might point to predictive prophecy in the Bible as proving God's complete foreknowledge, but many of the prophecies are announcements ahead of time of what God intends to do, or conditional prophecies which leave the outcome open. It is clear, also, that where God *has* foreordained certain events, he knows with certainty that they will come to pass, but these situations do not apply where humans have free decisions to take.

Important distinctions are made by philosophers between "present knowledge" (PK), "simple foreknowledge" (SFK) and "middle knowledge" (MK). According to SFK, God knows everything that creatures with freewill are going to do in the future. This view is characteristic of Arminianism, and is sometimes called "timeless knowledge". Its philosophical antecedents go back at least to Boethius²⁹ who holds that God is timeless, and a timeless being cannot know the outcome of human actions *in advance* of their performance. In this view, God is outside time, and simply 'sees' all of history or time at once. There is no past or future for him. Everything is an eternal present to God who therefore has exhaustive, definite knowledge of all future events³⁰. Arminius, however, is unable to explain God's knowledge of future contingents that depend on free choice. He believes God's will to be responsive to human activity, but finds it difficult to reconcile human freedom with divine foreknowledge.³¹ A helpful contribution to this problem has been made by Newlands. Reference has already been made above to his view that God is "both independent of time and...operating in time." As a consequence, Newlands is able to affirm that:

God's knowledge is not bound to space and time as ours is. This does not however entail that man's freedom is limited, because God knows in advance what will take place. God's knowledge is an informed knowing, and his concern for creation is an informed concern.³²

²⁹ Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*. Pt. V, Sec. III.

³⁰ See Hall, Christopher A., and Sanders J., *Does God Have a Future?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2003), 139. Furthermore, the view that God is timeless is unacceptable to open theists. Pinnock, for example, asks: "How could a temporal flow be timelessly known or postulated ahead of time if freedom is involved? In fact, God as temporal, knows the world successively and does not know future acts, which are freely chosen in a libertarian sense. (ibid., 101).

³¹ "The knowledge of God," Arminius states, "is eternal, immutable and infinite...and extends to all things, both necessary and contingent...But I do not understand the mode in which He knows future contingencies, and especially those which belong to free-will creatures." – *The Writings of James Arminius*, trans. Nichols J., and Bagnall, W.R., 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1956), 3:66.

³² Newlands, G., *God in Christian Perspective*, op.cit., 101.

It would appear that whether God has limited omniscience (as opentheists claim), or not, is not of vital significance to the conclusions of this thesis. What is of greater importance is that God has granted libertarian freedom to his creatures.

The difficulty which Arminius faces has relevance for his views on salvation. He lists his views on predestination, which he inherits from Thomism and the early Reformed orthodox position (in its general outline) in four Articles.³³ His fourth Article concerns the decree that determines the salvation and damnation of 'certain particular persons'. This decree has its foundation 'in the foreknowledge of God.' By this foreknowledge God knew -

from eternity those individuals who would through his prevailing grace, believe, and through his subsequent grace would persevere...and he likewise knew who would not believe and persevere.³⁴

Arminius's problem is that, in departing from Calvinism by making salvation dependent on personal faith in Christ, then, a person exercising such faith will be saved, whether or not there is a divine decree respecting his salvation. While he is certain that God's foreknowledge does not mean his foreordination (as in Calvinism), he does not seem to have faced the question that a decree based only on foreknowledge is not strictly speaking a decree. He speaks of the "decree to bestow faith,"³⁵ but one wonders how this relates to freewill.

In an attempt to escape from his difficulty, Arminius uses the concept of "Middle Knowledge" or "Molinism". This medieval concept is so named after its proposer, a Spanish Jesuit of the Counter-Reformation called Luis Molina (1535-1600). It is so called because Molina believes that it stands *between* God's knowledge in the first and third moments of creation. In the first unconditioned moment, God is said to know all possibilities, including all possible worlds. He knows every contingent state of affairs, which could possibly obtain, including what any free creature could freely choose to

³³ Arminius, *Works*, I, 589-90.

³⁴ *ibid.*

³⁵ "Predestination ...is the decree of the good pleasure of God in Christ by which he resolved within himself from all eternity to justify, adopt, and endow with endless life...believers on whom he had decreed to bestow faith." – *ibid.*, II, 226-7, 235.

do in any set of circumstances which could become actual. In the second moment, God knows not just what creatures *could* do, but what they *would* do in any set of circumstances. Therefore, God knows that if he were to make actual certain states of affairs, then other contingent states of affairs would obtain. This knowledge is known as counterfactual knowledge, and is termed “middle knowledge” by Molina. God can arrange which states of affairs occur in such a way that his purposes are forwarded despite, or even through, the sinful choices of his creatures.³⁶ Arminius defines MK as “that by which God knows that, if this occurs, that will happen.”³⁷ Yet, this means that God has only a conditional knowledge of future contingents. God does not, in other words, have absolute foreknowledge. MK seeks to introduce into the divine mind an element of potency, or knowledge of possibility that is actualised by something external to God. As it would be outside the divine willing, it would seem to be an uncertain and indeterminate knowledge.

Opentheists reject MK, as there is doubt as to whether it is really possible. How can God know what every possible creature would do in any possible set of circumstances, if the agent is genuinely free to do otherwise?³⁸ The only possible way in which he could know is if he had timeless knowledge. Also, whereas MK suggests that God knows everything that will happen in the actual world, because he selected and created it out of all possible worlds, this ignores the fact that which possible world is actualised, depends on free human decisions as well as God’s.

Opentheists, then, like Pinnock, claim that God has only PK, otherwise, if God knows what is going to happen in the future, then the future is fixed in every detail, and human freedom is infringed.³⁹ God’s omniscience, however, is still very considerable, because he knows every possible choice, and every possible consequence. He also possesses unrivalled insight into human character and behaviour. This limited

³⁶ A full philosophical description of Middle Knowledge is given in Craig, W.L. *The Only Wise God: The Compatibility of Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1987), 237-78.

³⁷ Arminius, *Disputationes Publicae*, IV, xliii, xlv.

³⁸ MK is also rejected by Nelson Pike – “I think that the doctrine is incoherent. If God knew (and thus believed) at t₁, that Jones would *do* X at t₂, I think it follows that Jones was not able to do other than X at t₂. Thus if God knew (and thus believed) at t₁ that Jones would *do* X at t₂, it would follow that Jones did X at t₂, but *not freely*.” – Pike, N., “Divine Omniscience and Voluntary Action” in Fischer J.M. (ed.), *God, Foreknowledge and Freedom*, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1989), 68.

³⁹ Pinnock, C., *The Openness of God*, *op.cit.* 121.

omniscience is sometimes called *presentism*. It has the great advantage, from a religious point of view, that it allows for genuine dialogue between God and ourselves, including his response to our prayers. It is significant that Pinnock and other opentheists, with their belief in limited omniscience, go beyond the typical Arminian position. Most Arminians, as has been noted, believe in the absolute foreknowledge of God. They assert that God chooses us because he knows in advance that we will choose to believe in him, thus impairing human freedom to choose.

A response to Pinnock's belief in God's limited omniscience is made by Robert Picirilli, who speaks from within the Arminian camp.⁴⁰ He maintains that God's knowledge of all things must be certain; some of these certainties are necessary, while others are truly contingent. That means that God knows all future events perfectly, including the free, moral choices of human beings. The freedom which human beings have is a relative freedom, and is entirely subject to God's government of all things for the accomplishing of his will. It is very difficult, however, to distinguish Picirilli's view from Calvinistic compatibilism, except that, although his view involves an element of foreordination, it is foreordination by permission. This permission does not make moral choices *necessary*, and it is the foreknowledge, rather than foreordination, that makes them *certain*.

Opentheists, however, redefine God's foreknowledge to mean that God knows all that it is possible to know, and the future free acts of moral agents cannot possibly be known. Hence, this view has been termed "the limited foreknowledge" or the "limited omniscience" view. It is preferable to Picirilli's position, which appears to compromise the genuineness of human freedom to choose.

There are other respects in which opentheism is much closer to Arminianism than it is to the Augustinian/Calvinist tradition. The Arminian does not believe that there is an exhaustive divine plan for this world. In his view, God, in creating free persons, has in effect created co-creators. Events occur which are consequent upon the human will, and which God does not will or want. Opentheists agree with this limited view of God's omnipotence.

⁴⁰ Picirilli, R.E., "Foreknowledge, Freedom and the Future," in *JETS* 43/2 (June 2000), 259I-71.

Arminianism also departs from Calvinism in rejecting irresistible grace.⁴¹ In so doing, Arminius's chief concern is to defend the justice of God. If the sinner cannot respond to the gospel without irresistible grace, and if this grace is not given at all, then, how can God justly condemn those to whom he has not given it? Opentheists also subscribe to this denial of irresistible grace, believing that any man may reject grace 'to his eternal ruin.'

The Arminian concept of human freedom being able to resist God's will also highlights the significant difference between Augustinian/Calvinistic monergism on the one hand, and Arminian and Opentheist synergism, on the other hand. The Reformed monergistic view of regeneration makes the sinner, not only able to will the good, but also willing it. The sinner wills because God changes the disposition of his heart. Synergists, by contrast, hold that one can 'choose Christ' or 'believe in Christ' prior to regeneration. The grace of regeneration is offered to all, but it is 'efficacious' only in the case of those who first accept the offer, or act in faith to receive it. Furthermore, Arminians, followed by opentheists, also depart from Calvinist views in holding that the true believer can fall from grace, and lapse into final apostasy.⁴²

(b) Libertarianism in Recent Anglican Theology

A number of prominent Anglican philosophical theologians have recently considered the theme of divine sovereignty and libertarian freewill. In this section of the chapter, the thinking of J.R. Lucas, John Polkinghorne, Richard Swinburne and Keith Ward, in particular will be studied and it will become obvious how close some of their ideas are to opentheism.

⁴¹ Arminius declares, "All unregenerate persons have freedom of will, and a capability of resisting the Holy Spirit, of rejecting the proffered grace of God, of despising the counsel of God against themselves, or refusing to accept the Gospel of grace, and of not opening to Him who knocks at the door of the heart; and these things they can actually do, without any difference of the *Elect* and the *Reprobate*. – Arminius, *Works*, 2: 721.

⁴² Pinnock rejects the Arminian view in these terms – "I found I could not shake off the intuition that such a total omniscience would necessarily mean that everything we will ever choose in the future will have been already spelled out in the divine knowledge register, and consequently the belief that we have truly significant choices to make would seem to be mistaken." – Pinnock, C.H., "From Augustine to Arminius: A Pilgrimage in Theology," in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, op.cit., 25.

Hasker's definition of libertarianism, quoted above, does not mention the causation of humanly free actions. He would seem to imply that the decision of the agent is the sole factor in human choices and resultant action. Yet, enquiry must be made into who or what influences the agent's will. Lucas includes various factors in the causation of human actions. He is in line with libertarian thinking in identifying one's own decision to act or to refrain from acting as the free choice of the individual, yet he recognises a "causal complex". While the agent's decision is the most significant factor, there is a "conjunction of other circumstances". These could include other people, and he gives, as biblical examples, the interaction of Solomon and his workers in building the temple, or the dialogue in Genesis 3, between the serpent and Adam and Eve⁴³. Lucas goes on to consider the input of God into human decision-making, and finds himself in agreement with compatibilist thinking. In Lucas's view, the responsibility for human actions rests with both God and human beings, and he gives, as an example, the conversion of Augustine. Though it may be said that God was primarily responsible, it is true that Augustine was free to reject God.⁴⁴

Richard Swinburne also holds that where an agent has libertarian freewill, there is:

a totality of causes that influence him (making it easier for him to make a particular choice), but do not totally determine how he will choose⁴⁵.

Later in the same work Swinburne pins his flag firmly to the libertarian mast. After exploring the possibility of "brain indeterminacy, sufficient for human free choices to produce physical effects", he affirms libertarian freewill because the ways in which humans decide to act do not necessarily mean that they are caused by physical events. There could, of course, be non-physical causes which explain their decisions, but, if there are none, humans form their intentions by libertarian freewill. The most likely non-physical cause is God. The extent of human suffering at the hands of other humans would seem to indicate, however, that God does not form human intentions for them. Humans are free agents with libertarian freewill.⁴⁶

⁴³ Lucas, J.R., *Freedom and Grace*, (London: SPCK., 1976), 6-7.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, 7-8.

⁴⁵ Swinburne, Richard, *The Existence of God*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979, rev.ed.,2004), 113.

Outwith Anglican theology, similar libertarian views to those of Lucas and Swinburne are held by Vincent Brümmer. He distinguishes between the sufficient conditions for someone's action, and the necessary conditions. Only the agent himself can bring about the sufficient conditions for his action. No-one else can do this for him. Other people, however, can provide some of the necessary conditions which the action requires, such as the means or the motive. The choice to perform the action remains that of the agent alone. Brümmer then applies this explanation of the causation of human actions to the relationship between divine and human agency. Human beings can freely choose actions which further God's purposes, availing themselves of his grace to enable them to do so. In this way, they are instrumental in carrying out God's will. God may provide the necessary conditions for the action to occur – such as revealing his will, and motivating and inspiring the agent to perform them. Without these conditions, the human agent may not find it possible to realise God's will, but the agent still has freedom to choose to defy God's will.⁴⁷

Views such as these are at odds with a determinist theology which believes that an omnipotent God has control over human intentions and actions. It is therefore a notable feature of the thinking of all the theologians who are being considered here, (in common with opentheists), that God voluntarily restricts the exercise of his omnipotence, in order to allow humans freewill. The granting of such freedom to creatures by God, would, according to Ward, be conditioned on their power being finite. God could annihilate this power whenever he wished to. He can also set limits to human freedom, and the alternatives between which humans would require to choose.⁴⁸

It is important, then, to realise that the ultimate sovereignty remains with God, in that he retains the power to determine everything if he so wills. When thinking of the future, the range of possibilities are wholly determined by God.⁴⁹ God also retains the

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, 170.

⁴⁷ Brümmer, V., *Speaking of a Personal God*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 114-5.

⁴⁸ Ward, K., *Rational Theology and the Creativity of God*, *op.cit.*, 82.

⁴⁹ There are significant connections here with the Process philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead, as Ward points out when he refers to that part of God's threefold nature which Whitehead calls God's primordial character: "The primordial nature sets out all the possibilities, but is 'deficiently actual' ... History is now created by an infinite number of free creative events. In this process, God is confined to influencing or 'luring' their decisions in a specific direction. But God does not determine the future, or

power to intervene directly in human affairs in order to prevent some particular evil, or guide matters towards an appropriate end. Yet this would be occasional, and would not be done in such a way that human freedom and autonomy would be infringed.⁵⁰ As well as requiring us to believe in a kenosis of God's omnipotence, human freedom requires us also to believe in a kenosis of God's omniscience. Indeed, Swinburne draws a comparison between the two, on the analogy of Aquinas's doctrine of omnipotence. According to Aquinas, omnipotence does not mean the ability to do anything, but rather the ability to do anything which is logically possible. Likewise, omniscience could mean "knowledge of everything true which it is logically possible to know". It would be possible to know future states which are physically necessitated by events in the past or present. But where there is no necessary physical causation, then of logical necessity, no person can know with absolute certainty that it will happen.⁵¹

This point of view marks another deviation from theological determinism, which maintains that as God is omniscient, he knows everything infallibly, including the future in all its detail. This means that our future acts are already preordained and fixed, so that human freedom is ruled out. Various attempts have been made to avoid this incompatibility, including the view that God's foreknowing is not a *cause* of the predicted actions taking place. It has been held that although God foresees our actions, humans, and not God, are responsible for them (the compatibilist position). It is indeed true that, to predict an action, is not to cause it, but, as Lucas observes, if this prediction is held to be infallible, and if it is perhaps made long before the agent is born, then there is no way in which he could be responsible for the action.⁵²

Nevertheless, the limitation on God's omniscience is not absolute. There is a great deal which God does know about the future. He knows what will happen as a matter of necessity from his own laws of nature. Furthermore, even as humans can sometimes accurately predict what other humans will do, so can God – and indeed, more so, as he has a deeper knowledge of our past behaviour, our present motivation and the likely

even have very great control over it." (Ward, K., *A Guide to the Perplexed*, (Oxford: One World, 2002), 172.

⁵⁰ This point is made by J.R. Lucas in *The Future* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 230.

⁵¹ Swinburne, R., *The Coherence of Theism*, op.cit., 175. This view also recalls opentheist thinking as in Pinnock, C.H. *Most Moved Mover*. (see footnote 27).

predisposition of our characters. His foreknowledge, although not infallible, enables him to predict the likely course of events, and to act in response to the free decisions of humans in such a way that everything works out for the best.

The central point, however, to be made here, is that omniscience is incompatible with future free choices of humans⁵³. The question which now calls for an answer is – why does God so ordain creation that he restricts his omnipotence and omniscience in such a way that humans have room and freedom to act with relative independence? The answer would seem to be that only in this way could humans be morally responsible for their actions.

Among the causes which can be listed as explaining human actions are a person's brain state, or his genetic make-up, or his upbringing.⁵⁴ These are certainly factors which do influence human attitudes and decisions, but if these are considered to be the prime motivators operating on a person's will, as a matter of physical necessity, then that person cannot not be blamed or praised for his action. In making this point, Swinburne also applies it to the influence of some other person upon the agent's action. If the other person's influence determines the person's decision, that person cannot be held morally responsible.⁵⁵ Ward finds scripture warrant for the same point, concluding from texts such as Ezekiel 3:16-21 and Jeremiah 18:7-11, that human beings are responsible for choosing righteousness or sin. Frequently, in the Bible, God invites people to choose between a way of life and a way of death. For humans to be responsible for such choices, God has to give them freewill.⁵⁶

⁵² Lucas, J.R., *The Freedom of the Will*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 74.

⁵³ The philosophical argument for this conclusion given by Swinburne is as follows: "S does not have it in his power at t₁, to bring about which beliefs a person has at t (nobody can influence that after t), but S does have it in his power at t₁ to bring it about that a belief that a person has at t about what S will do at t₁ is a false belief. Hence, if S is a free agent at t₁, and P is a person at t with beliefs about everything describable as a true proposition, P will be in danger of having one of his beliefs made false by the action of S at t₁. I conclude that P could not be justified in holding beliefs about the future actions of a perfectly free agent. It seems doubtful whether it is logically possible that there both be an omniscient person, and also free men." (Swinburne, R., op.cit., 83).

⁵⁴ In considering the influences which Ward identifies as being among the possible causes of human actions, it is noteworthy that he concludes that human choice is ultimately inexplicable: "If the agent accepts a reason for acting, does he do so freely, or is he determined by his mental make-up to accept it? One must say that it is just an ultimate human choice about what one is to do (e.g. act selfishly or altruistically). Therefore, freedom, by its essential nature must be inexplicable." - Ward, K., *Ethics and Christianity*, (London: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1970), 223.

⁵⁵ Swinburne, R., op.cit., 146-7.

⁵⁶ Ward, K., *Religion and Creation*, op.cit., 15.

The biblical witness underlines the high-risk strategy of God in giving human beings freedom, as was noted, in particular, when studying the opentheism of Sanders. The gift of freedom means that God's purposes (at least in the short term) can be thwarted. His creatures may not do what he wants them to do. Ward notices that this result of libertarianism contradicts the traditional theology of, for example, Aquinas – "God's will inevitably is always fulfilled" (S.T.qu.19,art.6). Ward deals with this by distinguishing between divine intentions and permissions. There is an inevitability about what God intends, but God cannot intend the decisions of another rational creature. He can only hope, wish or desire the creature to act accordingly, but these hopes can be, and are frequently thwarted, which is what happens when humans sin.⁵⁷

God's permission of human beings to sin is sometimes advanced as a partial answer to the problem of evil. It is certainly easier to reconcile this point of view with God's love and justice than the theological determinism which believes in a God who controls everything – good and bad alike.

The theology of the Anglicans which is being considered, and also opentheism, believes that God limits his omnipotence in order to allow human beings freedom to act. God's general providence permits everything which happens, without exercising detailed control. This means (as was noted above), that not all that happens is in accordance with God's will, as it would be, if God exercised meticulous providence in the way that determinists believe. This is in keeping with an interpretation of evolutionary history, mentioned by Polkinghorne, which understands creation as 'making itself'.⁵⁸ The problem of evil is therefore eased for theodicy, because God does not directly will or cause human crime. It results, instead, from the exercise of sinful human wills. This way of thinking is known as *the freewill defence*, and is to be preferred to a determinist position, which, instead of creating humans who are capable of responsible action relegates them to the level of 'blindly obedient automata'.⁵⁹ Polkinghorne uses a similar line of thought to account for natural evil (disease and disaster). He advocates there a *free-process defence*, whereby the processes of the

⁵⁷ Ward, K. *Rational Theology and the Creativity of God*, op.cit., 83.

⁵⁸ Polkinghorne, J., "Kenotic Creation and Divine Action" in Polkinghorne, J., (ed.), *The Work of Love*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2001), 102.

world are allowed by their Creator to be themselves – hence the event of an earthquake or the incidence of cancer.⁶⁰

One might wonder whether the permission which God gives to his creatures, allowing them to sin freely, might imperil his long-term designs for his Creation. If he has created a world in which he looks for human co-operation to help in bringing his plans to fruition, what happens ultimately when his creatures fail to co-operate? We saw in open theism, that when God's plan A fails because of human sin, he falls back upon plan B. The same divine strategy is recognised by Lucas who finds the answer in God's infinitude and infinite resource. When we fail to fulfil God's plan for us, there is brought about a new situation, which may not be foreseen, and is certainly undesired. This calls for new remedies from God, for which he may once again require our co-operation if his adjusted purpose is to be carried out.⁶¹

This adaptation of divine planning in response to human sinning, Ward also finds in the Bible in 1 Kings 21:17-24, 27-29; Jonah 3:7-9; St Luke 13:3, 5. These texts provide examples of how God can change his mind, when humans repent. Our repentance wipes out the past, and we escape the consequences of our evil acts which would otherwise follow.⁶² While it is true that God's plans can be thwarted in the short term, requiring him, in his infinite resourcefulness, to resort to back-up plans, his final purposes cannot be ultimately frustrated. This would appear to be the gospel of the Resurrection and Ascension of Christ, that the evil manifest in the crucifixion does not have the last word, and that God's ultimate victory in the vanquishing of evil is assured.

The final achievement of the goal of creation is linked by Ward to evolutionary theory, and his thinking here is in line with that of Polkinghorne. The process of evolution is non-deterministic, and contains an appropriately random element, which fits in well

⁵⁹ Polkinghorne, J., *Science and Providence*, (London: SPCK., 1989), 65.

⁶⁰ Polkinghorne quotes as an example of the free-process defence, Austin Farrer's explanation of the Lisbon earthquake of 1755. Farrer wrote – "The will of God in the event is his will for the elements of the earth's crust or under it: his will is that they should go on being themselves and acting in accordance with their natures." (Polkinghorne, J., *ibid.*, 67). God deliberately restricts his power in both cases – moral and natural evil – in order to give his creatures space to act freely.

⁶¹ Lucas, J.R., *Freedom and Grace*, *op.cit.*, 30.

⁶² Lucas, J.R., "Foreknowledge and the Vulnerability of God" in Vesey G. (ed.), *The Philosophy in Christianity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 119.

with the freedom which God gives to his creatures. Ward identifies purpose almost everywhere in the universe, and he believes that purpose involves the communities where “self-aware, self-directing, sentient beings” are able consciously to relate to the Creator.⁶³

As was noted in the study of opentheism, these Anglican scholars believe that the biblical testimony is that God looks for a response of love from his creatures. He wishes them to share in his purposes for Creation, and this is only possible if they are free beings, nearer to the divine nature, and able to interact with him.⁶⁴

(c) Libertarian Freewill and Compatibilism Compared

Of the main types of freewill known to theology and philosophy, the principal alternative to libertarianism is compatibilism. This kind of freedom is so-called because it is compatible with determinism. Determinism is defined by Richard Taylor in these terms:

The general philosophical thesis which states that, for everything that ever happens, there are conditions, such that, given them, nothing else could happen.⁶⁵

There are three kinds of determinism as outlined by Roy Weatherford:

Physical determinism asserts that natural laws are strictly determinative of future consequences, so that, given one initial state of a physical system, at a definite later time, there is one and only one outcome possible.

Psychological determinism restricts itself to the consideration of human beings and their actions. It contends that all our actions are the result of genetic and environmental conditioning. It places the sources of our actions within our own psyche, while denying that we are really in control.

⁶³ Ward, K., *God, Chance and Necessity*, (Oxford: One World, 1996), 191.

⁶⁴ See Swinburne R., *The Existence of God*, op.cit., 119. and Ward K., *Rational Theology and the Creativity of God*, op.cit., 82.

⁶⁵ Taylor, Richard, “Determinism”, in *Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* op.cit., 2.359.

Theological determinism asserts that the existence of God might be said to guarantee that the future of the world is fixed because of (1) God's decrees, and (2) God's foreknowledge.⁶⁶

Physical causation clearly affects all human actions, simply because our actions flow from our intentions, and our intentions are causally necessitated through the brain. As Swinburne observes, when human beings have certain beliefs and desires, this happens through the brain when "stimuli...land on the sense-organs or stimulate the peripheral nervous system."⁶⁷

The key question to be considered is where these stimuli originate. There would be general agreement that our free choices are influenced by our heredity and genetic make-up, also by the environment, and by conditioning, for example, educational nurturing. Full-scale 'hard' physical and psychological determinism would limit the origination of human decision-making and action to these controlling influences and this would lead to outright denial of libertarian freewill. Humans would simply be puppets, the strings of whose actions would be pulled by their biological make-up and by the environment. Hard determinism means that our moral choices would be fixed and predictable. Such a conclusion is unacceptable to most Christian opinion which finds in scripture strong evidence that, even in a world controlled by divine sovereignty, humans are called upon to take moral decisions, and are able to make choices for good or evil for which they can be praised or blamed.

The type of determinism which is principally to be considered here is 'soft' determinism or compatibilism. This is defined by Hasker as follows:

An agent is free with respect to a given action at a given time, if, at that time, it is true that the agent can perform the action if she decides to perform it, and she can refrain from the action if she decides not to perform it.⁶⁸

David Hume gives classical expression to the position in these words:

⁶⁶ Weatherford, Roy, *The Implications of Determinism*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 3.

⁶⁷ Swinburne, R., *The Evolution of the Soul*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 231.

⁶⁸ Hasker, W., *op.cit.*, 137.

By liberty, then, we can only mean a power of acting or not acting, according to the determinations of the will... Now this hypothetical liberty is allowed to belong to everyone who is not a prisoner in chains.⁶⁹

Hasker draws attention to the difference between libertarianism and compatibilism in that in the former, the agent, in order to be free, must have it in her power without qualification to perform the action, whereas in the latter, she need only have the power to perform it if she *chooses* to do so. Such freewill is thus said to be compatible with one's choices which determine one's actions. This leads us back into enquiring into the sources of our choices. Obviously, our desires have a part to play, and also, perhaps more significantly, our characters and dispositions, for sometimes our desires conflict with each other, or with our sense of duty. It could be said that when a person's desires are controlled by a "sinful nature", the person will want to sin, and is free to do so. Her sinful nature might be described as the remote cause producing her desires, whereas her desires function as the proximate cause of her willing.

The compatibilist view has been formalised from Hobbes onwards in a conditional sense:

You *would* have done otherwise *if* you had willed or chosen or wanted to do otherwise.

Conditional analyses have been rejected over the past few decades on two grounds – one, suggesting that conditional analyses do not provide *necessary* conditions for the possession of powers or abilities, the other, that they do not provide *sufficient* conditions.⁷⁰

The compatibilist position has been defended in recent years by Daniel Dennett. Dennett cites Richard Dawkins in holding that, although we are born with built-in, biologically endorsed sets of biases, we can overthrow these innate preferences.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Hume, David, *An Enquiry into Human Understanding*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1902), (1748), 100

⁷⁰ The argumentation for this criticism is to be found in Kane Richard, *The Significance of Freewill*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 53.

⁷¹ Dawkins, Richard, *The Selfish Gene*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 215. Dawkins puts the point well: "We have the power to defy the selfish genes of our birth... We can even discuss ways of deliberately cultivating and nurturing pure, disinterested altruism – something that has no place in

Dennett then goes on to describe other influences which affect our human decisions, such as the mutual, persuasion, reflection and instruction that come from our place in society. These influences create values which replace the cruder ones inherited from our ancestors. These persuasions are then built into an ordered system of moral codes and principles.⁷²

The prospect that determinism might “erode control”, says Dennett, is what arouses our concern, but he maintains that there is nothing in our past which controls us – indeed Mother Nature has designed us to fend for ourselves. Compatibilists, then, believe that, despite outside influences, we retain the power to will our actions. Dennett, however, fails to identify the source of our free action. He points out that because we do not know the source, we imagine it to be “a rather, magical, mysterious entity, the unmoved mover, the active self.”⁷³

We have the power to develop “the self” through social interaction, and, indeed, we have the capacity for significant self-improvement through learning. One’s character, however, is not solely the accumulated results of free choices, because of the chance possession of initial strength or talent, and also of the chance encounters one experiences during the period of self-creation. The more talented we are, the more we are able to control our destiny, and the greater are the responsibilities entrusted to us, and then our moral choices and actions are regarded as due to much more than luck.

The most important point in the controversy between libertarianism and compatibilism centres upon the attribution of moral responsibility. The typical libertarian position is expressed by Peter van Inwagen:

Almost all philosophers agree that a necessary condition for holding an agent responsible for an act is believing that the agent *could have* refrained from performing that act.⁷⁴

nature... We, alone on earth, can rebel against the tyranny of the selfish replicators,” – quoted by Dennett, Daniel, *Elbow Room*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 45.

⁷² Dennett, *ibid.*, 46.

⁷³ *ibid.*, 79.

⁷⁴ Van Inwagen, Peter, “The Incompatibility of Freewill and Determinism,,” in *Philosophical Studies*, 27 (1975), 185-199.

This is the principle which holds that one has acted freely (and responsibly), only if one could have done otherwise. Dennett holds that this principle is simply false, and marshals a number of arguments in support of his view⁷⁵. Dennett also uses the historic illustration of Luther's "Here I stand. I can do no other", to show that Luther was still responsible for his stand, despite his conscience making it impossible for him to recant. Dennett also instances the function of parental training and moral education in making us unable to do the things we would be blamed for doing if we did them. Dennett's conclusion is that it would not do us any good to know whether or not, on some occasion, an agent could have done otherwise than he did. For, we would learn nothing about his character, or likely behaviour on similar occasions. Ultimately, for soft determinists like Dennett, the freedom of the agent to control his moral decisions and actions is all-important. This, he can do, despite the determining influences of his current state, and features of the environment over which he has no control. Dennett's claim is that the only kind of freewill "worth wanting" is where agents are capable of, and wish to initiate projects and deeds for which they will be responsible. Dennett believes that we have freewill of this kind, and that it results from "our biological endowment, extended and enhanced by our initiation into society."⁷⁶

The most persuasive account of the indeterminist position, in Dennett's eyes, is that of Richard Kane in his *The Significance of Freewill*, but, as will become obvious Dennett remains unpersuaded. In outlining his indeterminism, Kane uses two fundamental concepts – the first of these is "alternative possibilities" (AP), where the agent has the power or ability to do otherwise, and, this, Kane regards as a necessary, although, not a sufficient condition of freewill. The other concept he uses is that of "ultimate responsibility" (UR). The basis for this is that, when an agent's choice issues from his character and motives, there are choices or actions in the past, which have causally contributed to the agent's having the character and motives he now has – and for these past choices, he is ultimately responsible. Kane holds that UR is a necessary condition of freewill. Kane's belief that AP is incompatible with determinism is in line with the "Consequence Argument" advanced by van Inwagen in these terms:

⁷⁵ Dennett, op,cit., 132.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, 169.

If determinism is true, then our acts are the consequences of the laws of nature, and events in the remote past. But it is not up to us, what went on before we were born, and neither is it up to us what the laws of nature are. Therefore, the consequences of these things (including our present acts), are not up to us.⁷⁷

Kane claims that this argument shows that if determinism is true, no agent could have done otherwise, which would imply in turn (given the AP condition), that no one has freewill.⁷⁸ Kane's "incompatibility thesis" of freewill exercised by finite agents with UR, requires that these agents perform undetermined self-forming actions (SFAs). Kane says that Luther's "Here I stand" would have been an affirmation for which he was UR, even if it was determined, and even if he could not have done otherwise, so long as it was a willed action (issuing from his character and motives), and he was responsible for earlier undetermined SFAs for the character and motives from which the affirmation issued.⁷⁹ Kane goes on to list a number of good reasons why we should want UR. These include moral responsibility in an ultimate sense, and genuine (freely given) love and friendship between persons, and towards God. A further important value is mentioned by Ted Honderich, who thinks that, if all our actions were determined, something important to our sense of individuality would be lost. If all of a person's actions were determined, then the explanation of these actions would not be "individual to, or peculiar to the person"⁸⁰.

Honderich also argues that an open (indeterministic) universe rather than a closed (deterministic) one, means that we can have what he calls "life-hopes" for the future. These are hopes for a future which would not be fixed, nor dictated by our environment, nor by the way our natures disposed us to act.⁸¹

We can rise above the conditioning and influence of the past to produce something new by our own efforts. This list of goods ensured by an incompatibilist position has relevant applications to the final destiny of the unevangelised, as will be explained below.

⁷⁷ Van Inwagen, P., *An Essay on Freewill*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 16.

⁷⁸ Kane R., *The Significance of Freewill*, op.cit., 45.

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, 77.

⁸⁰ Honderich, T., *A Theory of Determinism*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), vol.2, 68.

In seeking the fundamental cause of SFAs, Kane resorts to mentioning quantum indeterminacies in the brain, which are experienced by people as the “efforts of will”, which they are making to resist temptation, for example, in ethical situations⁸²

Critics of libertarian theories challenge this view on the grounds that such undetermined actions would be ‘arbitrary’, ‘capricious’, random’ or ‘irrational’. But defenders of the theory claim that actions originating in this way would not be arbitrary, since the agent would have a reason for his action, and would be intending, and trying to perform it for that reason. Kane, however, puts his finger on one of the imponderables underlying his theory, when he asks, how perceptions and various conscious events of will, or choices can at the same time be physical processes of the brain. He notes that this is a problem for compatibilists, incompatibilists and determinists alike. There are difficulties in understanding both consciousness and quantum indeterminacy. But the mysteriousness surrounding them is created particularly by libertarian theories of freedom.⁸³

Dennett has responded in detail to Kane’s theory in his book *Freedom Evolves*. He maintains that, even in a deterministic world, there can be “self-generated improvement”:

Our natures aren’t fixed because we have evolved to be entities *designed* to change their natures in response to interactions with the rest of the world. It is confusion between having a fixed *nature*, and having a fixed *future* that motivates the anguish over determinism.⁸⁴

According to Dennett, there are real options, even in a deterministic world. The variability in the output of our faculties of practical reasoning, arises, he claims, from a varied input from our memories, current state and circumstances. We need never make the same decision twice, because time marches on, and the system never faces exactly the same input on two occasions. This is a deterministic arrangement, whereas Kane claims that our faculty of practical reasoning is equipped with indeterminism “somewhere between the input and output”. The central thrust of Dennett’s attack

⁸¹ *ibid.*, 22.

⁸² Kane, *op.cit.*, 130.

⁸³ *ibid.*, 148, 151.

⁸⁴ Dennett, *Freedom Evolves*, (New York: Viking, 2003), 93.

upon Kane's theory focuses on the nature of the quantum indeterminacy. As this is not determined by anything, the agent cannot influence the indeterminate event. Dennett wonders, therefore, how the decision can be "up to you", if it is undetermined. You would have "to *co-opt* it or *join forces* with it," Dennett believes. But, in order to do that you would have to be *someone*. Your identity would comprise "memories, plans, beliefs and desires" acquired in your past life. These would be causal influences taking over control of your decision-making.⁸⁵

In defence of Kane's view, it can be said that he holds that the outcomes of inner conflicts in the will, are influenced by, but not determined by, past motives and character. So, it could be argued that even with the indeterminacy of the neural processes, it is this element of character influence which supplies the personal component of the decision.

Dennett also maintains that:

there is no way to tell a genuine SFA from a pseudo-SFA, an impostor bout of reasoning that never *actually* availed itself of quantum indeterminism, but just cranked out a pseudo-random and, hence, deterministic result.⁸⁶

A number of Kane's other critics focus upon the indeterminate nature of the process of the effort of the will, and wonder how the indeterminacy makes the agent truly responsible for the outcome; and indeed, whether the outcomes can be choices at all.

⁸⁷But Kane's response is that the indeterminate process in the agent's brain, preceding the choice, is experienced by him as an effort of will, not merely as a random occurrence in his brain, that happened to influence the outcome.⁸⁸

The relationship between libertarian freewill and moral responsibility is also explored by W.S. Anglin. He describes 'metachoice', when we choose which things we will henceforth think we ought to do. These metachoice affect our more ordinary choices.

⁸⁵ *ibid.*, 123.

⁸⁶ *ibid.*, 127.

⁸⁷ See Strawson Galen, "The Impossibility of Moral Responsibility" in *Philosophical Studies*, 75 (1994), 21, and Bernstein M., "Kantian Libertarianism" in *Southwest Philosophy Review*, (1995), 11;154.

⁸⁸ Kane, R., *op.cit.*, 182.

In his view, choosing values, in this sense, “transcends one’s previous values, culture and other determining factors.” Whereas compatibilists would argue that ‘metachoice’ are based on psychological needs, Anglin believes that they presuppose libertarian freewill.⁸⁹

Anglin also makes the same point, as was earlier noted in Kane’s thought, that unconditional love presupposes libertarian freewill.

A key question in deciding for libertarianism against compatibilism is one’s estimate of the role which character plays in moral choices. Compatibilists like Frederick Vivian typically emphasise the influence of the climate of opinion in the surrounding society, which moulds our interests and hopes and ideals. In a strong phrase, he even describes us as “to a large extent, prisoners of our environment”⁹⁰. Vivian holds that in most cases, where a person acts virtuously, it is because his conduct is “motivated by his acquired disposition or character.”⁹¹

When discussing Kane’s thought, the importance of SFAs (self-forming actions), was noted, but Vivian dismisses such concepts as the ‘will’, or ‘self’, believing that we cannot explain the origin of the ‘self’ or the ‘will’, and that such faculties or powers cannot arise out of nothing. While we can talk meaningfully of an individual being free, there are no such things as free actions. A person’s actions are not uncaused or fortuitous. Vivian’s conclusion is that the majority of our choices are determined by our desires, which are a function of our character. We have a feeling of freedom when we are making choices, and this feeling arises out of introspection, but when we let this feeling be divorced from our characters, freedom becomes synonymous with pure chance. The feeling of freedom which we have when we deliberate, and make decisions follows from our motives and desires. It is important to note that compatibilists like Vivian, in giving such a causal explanation for human conduct, still insist upon applying moral sanctions to our human choices and desires. Although we inherit certain physical and mental endowments, we still have the incentive to improve them, and with them, the moral side of our nature. We remain responsible to our

⁸⁹ Anglin, W.S., *Freewill and the Christian Faith*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 18.

⁹⁰ Vivian, Frederick, *Human Freedom and Responsibility*, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1964), 106.

⁹¹ *ibid.*, 108.

fellow citizens and to ourselves. Vivian draws attention, here, to a common misunderstanding concerning moral responsibility. It is often maintained, he says, that people are only morally responsible when their wills are free, but the opposite is true. No philosopher has yet shown how free acts – i.e. acts which are spontaneous and uncaused – are compatible with moral responsibility. His conclusion is that we are free when our choices determine our actions, and are themselves the expression of our own fundamental natures.⁹²

The opposing incompatibilist view is well stated by Swinburne, who holds that humans have freewill in the sense that they are not causally necessitated to do the actions they do by brain events or any other events. His thesis is that humans have the power to choose between desires of equal strength, and the power to resist desire, and do what they believe more worth-while.⁹³ Swinburne (as, for example, Kane) believes that character does not determine an agent's choice, but simply makes certain choices easy and others hard.

The foregoing comparison between libertarian and compatibilist positions has not yielded any incontrovertible answers to the quest for the origin of human decision-making. It could well be that in the present state of knowledge, Lucas's conclusion may be the wisest one- that if men have freewill, it is not possible to give a full explanation of their decisions. These decisions can fly in the face of reason, and what is right, making "the fundamental fact of freedom seem mysterious."⁹⁴

(d) Theological Determinism

Augustine

It is the relationship between divine sovereignty and human freedom which is of greatest importance in this chapter, and, therefore, attention must now be paid to theological determinism in the Augustinian/Calvinist tradition. This will begin with a study of Augustine's theology of God's sovereignty. His understanding of sovereignty emphasises the power of God. In his view, being almighty means that God is able to

⁹² *ibid.*, 175-6.

⁹³ Swinburne R., *op.cit.*, 231.

⁹⁴ Lucas, J.R., *Freedom and Grace*, *op.cit.*, 14.

do "whatsoever he pleases," nor can the almighty power of his will be "hindered by the will of any creature."⁹⁵

As the first cause, in Portalie's words, God is the "author of all good, of all moral perfection, of all salvation."⁹⁶ Augustine comes to this view as a result of his controversy with Pelagianism. He believes that the Pelagians are wrong in thinking that the human will, even in fallen man, is essentially free from the corruption of sin, and that men are able of themselves to choose and perform good works. His beliefs about the Fall of man are described by R.K. McGregor Wright, who indicates that Augustine held that before the Fall, Adam was able not to sin (*posse non peccare*), but also able to sin (*posse peccare*). This can be known because Adam in fact sinned, and chose to do so of his own freewill. His descendants are now unable not to sin (*non posse non peccare*). Believers who have been renewed in Christ, are back in Adam's position, being both able to sin, and able not to sin, and our choice depends on our level of sanctification and the means of grace.⁹⁷

Augustine is clear that, both before and after the Fall, humans have freewill, and, by freewill, he means the ability to make voluntary decisions without any coercion or constraint from outside forces or persons. He believes that it is only because we have such freedom to choose, that we are morally responsible. There are, however, occasions when he seems to deny freedom of the will to fallen man,⁹⁸ and this could be explained by a hardening in his attitude in his later years, caused by his controversy with Pelagianism. His final position appears to be that the sinner sins because he chooses to sin. As he is a fallen creature, he is not able without grace to choose righteousness. He is free to act in accordance with his desires, but these desires are only evil. His will is corrupted by his sinfulness, but he still retains the power to choose. The consequences of this choice and the responsibility for it, then, are due

⁹⁵ Augustine, "Enchiridion," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol.3 (ed.). Schaff, P., (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1956), 267.

⁹⁶ Portalie, E., *A Guide to the Thought of St Augustine*, (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1960), 192.

⁹⁷ Wright, R.K. McG., *No Place for Sovereignty: What's Wrong with Freewill Theism?* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 22.

⁹⁸ Augustine writes – "...when man by his own freewill sinned, then sin being victorious over him, the freedom of his will was lost." – "The Enchiridion" in *Basic Writings of St Augustine*, Oates, W.J. (ed.), 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 1:675 (Chap. 30). Elsewhere, he describes this understanding of

entirely to the sinner. Yet this view conflicts with his belief in the total sovereignty of God, and with the eternal decision of God. It also conflicts with Augustine's doctrine of the immutability of God – a point to which Ward draws attention.⁹⁹

Augustine is a compatibilist, endeavouring to reconcile theological determinism with human freewill. The early Augustine believes that human beings are the efficient causes of their own actions, through the efficacy of their wills.¹⁰⁰

The problem arises in Augustine's mind out of a consciousness of sin, coupled with his belief in a God who is wholly good, and to whom we are responsible for our sins. He is not prepared to sacrifice either of the two incompatibles. He considers all acts of will to be subject to the will of God "because they have no power but what He gives them."¹⁰¹ Although our wills are determined by God, we still have a feeling of freedom. One can see the conflict in Augustine's mind when he asks:

How then can that set order of causes in God's foreknowledge deprive our wills of power, seeing our wills bear such a sway amongst the very causes themselves?¹⁰²

The freedom thus allowed to humans is a very limited kind of freedom. He makes his choices in such a way that, unless God intervenes, he cannot be saved. He is in bondage to his own sinful impulses, and can only escape when liberated by the grace of God.¹⁰³ The paradoxical nature of Augustine's understanding of human freedom is described by R.C. Sproul, who maintains that Augustine considers that the sinner "is

freedom paradoxically as follows – "Man is free (*liberum*) to do what he likes, but he is not freed (*liberatum*,) from sin." – Augustine, *Rebuke and Grace*, 13.42.

⁹⁹ Ward says: "Augustine cannot say that God can create a will so that it is free to choose either X or Y in a way not determined by God. For, if the choice is made of X, many events will follow, which will be quite different from those which would follow from the choice of Y. God has to bring all those subsequent events into being. So, if God left the choice truly undetermined, God would have to let the subsequent creation depend to an indeterminate extent upon some creaturely act. That, God cannot do, since God is unaffected by creatures in any way, being wholly immutable.-(Ward, K., *Religion and Creation*, op.cit., 235).

¹⁰⁰ "For a man does not therefore sin because God foreknew that he would sin. Nay, it cannot be doubted but that it is the man himself who sins when he does sin, because He, whose knowledge is infallible, foreknew not that fate, or fortune, or something else would sin, but that the man himself would sin, who, if he wills not, sins not." – Augustine, "Freewill and God's Foreknowledge" in Dewey, R.E., and Gould J.A., (eds.), *Freedom, its History, Nature and Varieties*, (New York: Macmillan, 1970), 110.

¹⁰¹ Augustine, *Confessions*, Bk.V, ix.

¹⁰² *ibid.*

¹⁰³ Augustine, *Rebuke and Grace*, 13.42.

both free, and in bondage at the same time.”¹⁰⁴ He is free in the sense that he can act according to his own desires. The trouble is that “his desires are only evil.”

Lucas attempts to resolve the conflict between freewill and determinism, while surveying the controversy between Augustine and Pelagius.¹⁰⁵ He notes that in ordinary life, we regularly hold more than one person responsible for the same action – as, for example, in the Genesis account where the Fall of man is attributed to Adam and Eve and the serpent. Accordingly, Lucas says, we can ascribe to God the responsibility for man’s actions without denying man’s responsibility too. What we cannot do, is to say that both are primarily responsible. Lucas concludes:

We can allow to Pelagius, human freedom, while conceding to St Augustine that it is nevertheless God who is primarily responsible for man’s turning away from error and towards truth.¹⁰⁶

In the heat of the controversy with Pelagius, Augustine forges a strong doctrine of grace. Every good and salutary act by humans is the fruit of grace, a gift from God – as he says: “We know that grace... is given to adults for each and every act”.¹⁰⁷ This grace precedes and prepares everything, since good desires, faith and prayer must come from it¹⁰⁸. Augustine, however, is anxious not to compromise freedom of the will, by exalting grace. He knows, rightly, that without the power of choice, there is no responsibility, no merit, no demerit. The choice of the good is nevertheless directed by God, who has prepared the agent’s will to make the right choice. Whether a man believes or does not believe, is not the choice of a man’s freewill. When he believes, it is because he is one of the elect, whose will is prepared by God.¹⁰⁹

This grace of God is efficacious and works infallibly. Augustine does not use the adjective, ‘irresistible’ because he wishes the human will to remain master of itself. The soul remains master of its determination, but because God prepares it by various illuminations and enticements, it is always inspired to give its consent. The favourable decision is assured, because God, in his foreknowledge, knows who will respond

¹⁰⁴ Sproul, R.C., *Willing to Believe*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1967), 63.

¹⁰⁵ Lucas, op.cit., 7.

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*, 8.

¹⁰⁷ Augustine, *Letters*, 217,5,16.

¹⁰⁸ Augustine, *Concerning the Predestination of Saints*, 17,34.

favourably, and bestows upon them, thus making them 'elect'. Only those will be saved, whom God knows will wish to co-operate with the grace decreed for them. Augustine's doctrine of grace therefore involves predestination.

Before examining predestination, it should be noted that Augustine's compatibilism is regarded by many theologians as unacceptable today. Sanders, for example, comments on the dual causation to which Lucas referred above, where both Augustine and Calvin distinguish between remote and proximate causes. In their view, God was the remote cause, and so humans are still morally responsible, and free, as proximate causes. Yet, because the actions of the proximate cause are solely determined by the remote cause, "soft determinism is actually a determinism in freewill clothing."¹¹⁰

Swinburne also rejects Augustine's compatibilism, because he finds God's omniscient foreknowledge of all future actions incompatible with human freewill. If God foreknows anything, then it is certainly going to happen, and if it is certain that a human is going to act in a particular way, then the action cannot be free.¹¹¹

Swinburne also believes that if soft determinism were true, it would not be appropriate to apportion blame or praise, "because a man could not have done otherwise."¹¹²

God's foreknowledge also highlights a further difficulty. Augustine says that God foreknows future evil by knowingly and willingly permitting particular evil actions:

In a way unspeakably strange and wonderful, even what is done in opposition to His will, does not defeat His will. For it would not be done, did He not permit it, (and, of course, His permission is not unwilling, but willing); nor would a Good Being permit evil to be done only that in His omnipotence, He can turn evil into good.¹¹³

This view poses very pointedly the age-old problem of evil, and the view that the evil which God permits can be turned into good, hardly supplies a convincing answer.

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*, 5, 10.

¹¹⁰ Sanders J., "God as Personal" in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, *op.cit.*, 172.

¹¹¹ Swinburne, R., *The Coherence of Theism*, *op.cit.*, 173.

¹¹² *ibid.*, 147.

(e) The Doctrine of Predestination in Augustine and Calvin

It is time, now, to consider the topic of predestination. In his treatise on the *Predestination of the Saints*, Augustine writes that many people hear Christian truth expounded to them, and while some believe, others do not¹¹⁴. The reason for this is that God has prepared some, but not others. Those who receive the truth are the elect, and those who do not, have not been chosen to be Christians. G.R. Evans identifies two reasons for Augustine's belief – First, no-one deserved to be saved, and so, when God saves anyone, it is an act of mercy. Second, God 'foresees' those who will not believe, and so it is not a case of their being unjustly deprived of an opportunity for salvation. God knew who were potential believers, and these were the people "he prepared for the Kingdom of Heaven, and the company of the angels."¹¹⁵

This means that election is based, not simply on foreknowledge, but on foreordination. The later Augustine comes to this conclusion because he comes to see that election by foreknowledge is election by works, even if one calls the work 'faith'. In his controversy with Pelagius, he is anxious to ensure that there is no element of synergism in salvation. It must all be of grace. Grace is, in this sense, an effect of predestination.¹¹⁶ Augustine also believes that the predestination of the elect to eternal salvation is infallibly efficacious in achieving its effect¹¹⁷. Augustine believes that the saved as well as those predestined to damnation deserve to be damned, and why one should receive grace and another not receive it, he regards as a mystery. He defends this position by quoting Rom 11:33, to those who wish the mystery to be resolved –

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out.¹¹⁸

David Fergusson finds Augustine's doctrine of predestination to be unscriptural:

¹¹³ Augustine, *Enchiridion*, trans., Shaw, J.F., (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1961), 117.

¹¹⁴ Augustine, *Concerning Predestination of Saints*, 6.11.

¹¹⁵ Evans, G.R., *Augustine on Evil*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 135, referring to Augustine, *op.cit.*, 9.17.

¹¹⁶ "As the one who is supremely good, he made good use of evil deeds for the damnation of those whom he had justly predestined to punishment, and for the salvation of those whom he had kindly predestined to grace." – Augustine, *Concerning Predestination of Saints*, 10.19.

¹¹⁷ Augustine, *Rebuke and Grace*, 7.14.

¹¹⁸ Augustine, *Against Two Epistles of the Pelagians*. 4.6.16, quoted by Pelikan, J., *The Christian Tradition*, vol. 1, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, (1971), 298.

It seems to reach the conclusion that God has saved some and passed over others through the observation that some men and women respond to the call of the gospel while others fail to heed it. Yet this does not seem to be the basis upon which the Bible presents the idea of divine election. The election of Israel and of the church is predicated upon the freedom and love of God. The scope of God's love is not to be determined by observation of human choices.¹¹⁹

The other difficulty centres upon the effect this doctrine has upon human freedom. The earlier Augustine, following Justin Martyr, believes that God knows how freedom will be exercised, and that how God determines human destiny is influenced by this foreknowledge. Thus, human freedom is preserved. The later Augustine, however, as has already been noted, prepares the wills of those he foreordains for salvation. We are saved only by the unmerited bestowal of grace, and it seems irrelevant whether our actions are free, in a compatibilist sense or not. It is difficult to see how humans can merit either praise or blame, when their wills are determined by God. Again, this view is unscriptural, because scripture teaches that although God ordains everything which comes to pass, men and women are nevertheless accountable to God for their actions and omissions. (Acts 2:23).

There is a clear divergence, here, between compatibilist and incompatibilist views. According to incompatibilism, the divine grace and action is causally necessary, but never causally sufficient for salvation. Although faith is a gift of God's grace, it has to be appropriated by the believer, if it is to be a free act. According to libertarian views, the would-be Christian, in his choice, has the power to resist or frustrate God's grace. For the incompatibilist, this grace is not irresistible. The opposing Augustinian, compatibilist position is described by Helm who believes it to be based on scripture. It states that only grace is causally sufficient for faith, and it denies the libertarian conception of freedom. But there is another sense of freedom involved, because, when a person faithfully appropriates Christ, he is granted spiritual freedom, being freed from slavery to sin. One can only enjoy this freedom, when one has received grace.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ Fergusson, D.A.S., "Predestination: A Scottish Perspective," in *Scottish Journal of Theology*, vol.46, (1991), 459.

¹²⁰ Helm, P., "The Augustinian-Calvinist View" in Beilby, J.K., and Eddy, P.R., (eds.), *Divine Foreknowledge*, (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 170.

The libertarian account is to be preferred. It is difficult to see how one could be praised for the appropriation of irresistible grace. People can and do resist the Holy Spirit, and thereby thwart the will of God for their lives. (Isaiah 63:10; St Luke 7:30; Acts 7:51; Ephesians 4:30; Hebrews 3:8,15; 4:7). Boyd points out that even although humans can and must choose to accept God's offer of salvation, it may still be affirmed that salvation is completely a matter of God's grace. He indicates a confusion in Helm's thought in these words, between a *condition* of salvation, and a *cause* of salvation. We do not cause God to save us by having faith, for that would mean that we acquired merit, and our salvation would not then be solely by grace. Boyd believes that freewill theists have scripture on their side, in holding that salvation is given "*on the condition* that one places one's trust in the one giving it." Then, it is a matter of grace, and not of a merited reward.¹²¹

It is noteworthy that, in order to reconcile God's omniscience with human freewill, Augustine has to invoke the classical view of God's timelessness. The idea is that God transcends the category of time, rather than simply being everlasting. Augustine uses a striking illustration as an analogy.¹²² He pictures God as an infinite and eternal sea, in which the whole created order is immersed like a sponge. The sponge is both utterly surrounded and utterly penetrated by this sea. Moreover, the sea is measureless. Since God is an eternal being, he does not really foreknow anything. He simply *knows* eternally. From God's vantage point, he simply knows (not foreknows), what we *are* doing with our free choices. For what we have, are and will choose is *present* to God in his eternal *now*¹²³. Compatibilists will assert that God is not therefore foreordaining, but simply ordaining what humans are doing freely. Yet, the triple identification of predestination, foreknowledge and grace to be found in Augustine's writing on predestination implies that omniscience is omnicausality.

The findings of opentheists and Anglican scholars such as Ward, that we should renounce the idea of God's foreknowledge of free creaturely acts. should be accepted,

¹²¹ Boyd, G., "An Opentheism Response," *ibid.*, 193.

¹²² Augustine, *Confessions*, VII.5.

¹²³ *ibid.*, XI. 6-27.

otherwise it would mean in Ward's words – "that creatures have no contra-causal freedom."¹²⁴

The subsequent history of the Early Church indicates that there is considerable reservation about double predestination, which is largely ignored in the Eastern Church. In the Western Church at the Synod of Orange (A.D. 529), and afterwards, a more moderate predestination becomes the official teaching. While continuing to affirm election to salvation, it does not affirm predestination to perdition.¹²⁵

Calvin follows the Augustinian tradition closely. In his theology, God's sovereignty is total, and his majesty is awesome. The omnipotence and omniscience of God is the foundation on which his whole system of doctrine is built. In his thought, God is the originator of all things, and also determines and controls them at every moment. His omnipotence is continually active and effective, governing heaven and earth by his Providence. Nothing happens by chance; everything occurs in accordance with his knowing and willing decree.¹²⁶ From all eternity, he determines what should come to pass, and now by his power he effects what he has decreed.¹²⁷

Like Augustine, Calvin is certain that human beings are completely dependent upon God for the restoration of what has been lost. His attitude to the problem of freewill is that whereas we are free to will whatever we may wish, we are not free to achieve what we need most of all, the restoration of the freedom to live before God as those knowing the salvation that is God's greatest gift.¹²⁸ Calvin adopts Augustine's position that we are "indeed free, but not freed"¹²⁹ – "free of righteousness, but enslaved to

¹²⁴ "In Augustine's scheme, God's foreknowledge did not depend on any creaturely act, and could not be changed by any such act. The price to be paid is that creatures can have no contra-causal freedom." – Ward, K., *op.cit.*, 238.

¹²⁵ These developments are explained by Paul Jewett who describes the official teaching as suggesting that "the reprobate are condemned to eternal death, not because of God's decree, but because their resistance to the grace of God proves, in the end, to be incorrigible. Furthermore, in the case of the elect, though their faith is the gift of grace, this grace is not so irresistible as to violate the freedom of the creature who persists in sin." – Jewett, P., *Election and Predestination*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1985), 7.

¹²⁶ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.16.3.

¹²⁷ *ibid.*, 1.16.8.

¹²⁸ See Reist, B A., *A Reading of Calvin's Institutes*, (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 24.

¹²⁹ Calvin, J., *op.cit.*, 2. 2. 8.

sin”¹³⁰. The will, according to Calvin, was not destroyed by the Fall, but it was entirely conquered by perverted desires, and so could not desire anything right.¹³¹

Man, because of this perversion of the will, is unable to do good works without the aid of the special grace given to the elect by regeneration. Calvin says, referring to the Fathers, and especially to Augustine, that they all give praise for man’s good to the Holy Spirit.¹³²

Yet, Calvin himself holds to freewill, believing that, although man sins necessarily, he also sins voluntarily. He is in bondage to the devil, but it is he himself who sins. He is not forced to be the servant of sin. Yet he is so completely a sinner, that he not only is unable to redeem himself, but indeed does not wish to do so. Calvin, therefore, teaches a compatibilist doctrine of freedom.¹³³ Causally, the will is bound by the slavery of sin, and by the directing act of God, who moves our wills and deliberations, wherever and however he pleases. A person’s character, desires and volitions are worthy of praise or blame, irrespective of how they are acquired. Freedom is compatible with necessity. A free act is one that a person does voluntarily, under no external coercion or compulsion. It accords with his wants and desire. T.H.L. Parker draws attention, here, to the distinction which Calvin makes between necessity and compulsion, the former being inward, and the latter, outward.¹³⁴ Only for free acts can the person be held morally responsible.¹³⁵ In reaching this compatibilist conclusion, Calvin makes use of the concept of ‘proximate’ and ‘remote’ causes, rather as was noted above in

¹³⁰ *ibid.*

¹³¹ *ibid.*, 2.2.12.

¹³² “I dare affirm that, although they sometimes overmuch extolled freewill, their intention was to teach man to turn away from any confidence in his own power and place his strength in God alone.” – *ibid.*, 2.2.9.

¹³³ Helm notes that although “Calvin may never have espoused compatibilism in so many words, a number of pieces of evidence make it reasonable to believe that he was committed to compatibilism. One is the distinction he draws in *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* between necessity and compulsion (2.3.5.). Two significant pieces of external evidence suggest that compatibilism would be congenial to his view. The consensus view is that he was a compatibilist, and his successors, such as Francis Turretin (1623-1687) certainly took such a view, calling it the liberty of rational spontaneity, and denying the liberty of indifference. So, I believe that it is reasonable to interpret the Augustinian position, a position that clearly embraces the views of Calvin, as compatibilist.” (Helm, P., *op.cit.*, 162n3).

¹³⁴ “Man, as he is vitiated by the Fall, wills to sin, not unwillingly, or by coercion...by the movement of his own desire (*libido*), not by external compulsion. He cannot not be moved, and drawn to evil by the depravity of his own nature.” – Calvin, *Institutes*, *op.cit.*, 2.3.5, quoted by Parker, T.H.L., in *Calvin: An Introduction to his Thought*, (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1995), 55.

¹³⁵ Calvin, J., *op.cit.*, 2.5.1-2.

Lucas's thinking about double agency. As J.K.S. Reid observes, the proximate cause is man's, whereas only the remote cause is attributable to God's ordination. All the blame is attached to the proximate cause, endorsed by the "internal feeling of the heart" or "sense of sin."¹³⁶ The regenerated will turns towards God, but the unconverted will is disposed to evil. In succeeding, however, in attributing sin wholly to sinful persons as the proximate cause, Calvin appears to regard human sinning as a means to bringing about God's will – an evil means to a good end? Nor does Calvin make any exception for the 'virtuous heathen', whom Erasmus considers worthy of salvation. Calvin acknowledges that such good people exist, and that God's grace is present within them. But, as Parker observes, "this is not saving grace, but grace given for the sake of society."¹³⁷ – a view which would not hold out any hope for the final destiny of the unevangelised. Indeed, Calvin rejects any idea that virtuous people who lived before Christ's death and resurrection might be saved, although he believes that Jews living before Christ are in a different category because their hope always rested in Christ alone, rather than in their own law.¹³⁸ Some Calvinists, however, do believe that some of those who do not hear the gospel are brought to repentance and faith solely by general revelation.¹³⁹

Calvinists resort to a number of devices in order to reconcile the sovereign decrees of God with human freewill. They are listed by Jack Cottrell¹⁴⁰. The first of these is a redefinition of freewill. The type of freewill promoted by libertarianism, that is, the power of contrary choice, is rejected, and instead, freedom is defined as the ability to choose voluntarily and without coercion, as influenced by one's desires and motivation. A person is free as long as he is able to do what he *wants* to do. Yet what a person wants to do in any given situation is *determined* by outward circumstances and inner motivations. We can desire good things, for example, happiness, but, without the Holy Spirit, we cannot aspire to the good which is required for salvation. The Spirit is not given without the person first receiving the grace of regeneration.¹⁴¹ It is very

¹³⁶ Reid, J.K.S., Introduction to Calvin, J., *The Eternal Predestination of God*, (London: James Clarke & Co.Ltd., 1961), 24.

¹³⁷ Parker, T.H.L., op.cit., 55.

¹³⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.6.3.

¹³⁹ See Packer, J.I., *Celebrating the Saving Work of God*, (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1998), 163.

¹⁴⁰ Cottrell, J.W., "The Nature of Divine Sovereignty" in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, op.cit., 100-2.

¹⁴¹ Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.24.9.

doubtful whether such a restricted view of freedom is worthy of the name. Townley Lord describes it as *right* will, rather than *free* will¹⁴². The second device is the idea of second causes to which reference was made above by Reid. The weakness of this view is that man's will can never operate independently of God, but works only as moved by God, although in the second stage of conversion (after the initial step of regeneration), Calvin affirms, man is active, for it is man who does the believing. The third device is the concept of divine permission which was also used by Augustine. God sovereignly permits man to will and to do certain things. This is a modification of God's decree, because this is one area in which the decree is permissive, rather than efficacious. The permissive decree is limited only to *sinful* actions. The aim of this device is to relieve God of the actual responsibility for sinful acts, but, as was noted above in relation to Augustine, it still leaves God with the ultimate responsibility for evil. Cottrell rejects all three devices as inadequate, concluding that "Calvinism is a true determinism, and has no place for genuine freewill."¹⁴³

Calvin again follows the later Augustine, in his doctrine of predestination. He deals with it in order to answer the puzzling question why anyone at all responds to preaching – the seed of the Word coming to fruition in some, but not in others.¹⁴⁴ His answer is that some are adopted by his eternal decree, to the hope of life as his children, and heirs of the Kingdom, whereas the rest, by the same divine counsel, are non-elect and therefore reprobate, adjudged to eternal death¹⁴⁵. The elect display God's mercy and grace; the reprobate, his wrath and justice. Furthermore, Calvin also believes in certainty of salvation for the elect. Their election cannot be lost, and is as sure as God's eternal wisdom.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴² "Calvin was more concerned with *right* will, rather than *free* will. Right will is the result of divine restoration: this restored, it chooses the good." – Lord, F. Townley, "A Modern Estimate of Calvinism" in *The Baptist Quarterly*, IV, (1928-9), 86.

¹⁴³ *ibid.*, 106.

¹⁴⁴ Calvin's answer to the question is derived from Bucer who, in turn, follows Augustine's interpretation. Bucer cannot avoid the question of why some in Strasbourg accepted the Gospel and others did not. Augustine had had similar experiences in Hippo. – See Oberman, Heiko A., *The Two Reformations*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), 114. The doctrine of predestination also arises (in Calvin's case) out of early experiences of religious persecution in Paris, when it is seen as an encouragement to the faithful.

¹⁴⁵ Calvin, J., *op.cit.*, 3.21.5, and *Opera*, xxiv. 46.

¹⁴⁶ See Hunt, S.L., "Predestination in the 'Institutes of the Christian Religion' 1536-1559" in *An Elaboration of the Theology of Calvin*, Gamble, R.C., (ed.), (New York and London: Garland Publishing Inc., 1992), 190.

The earlier Augustine links predestination with God's foreknowledge, but Calvin stands squarely in the tradition of the later Augustine in believing that election is prior to faith and repentance. Election and knowledge are in the last resort identical. As Reid notes, a good will is the gift of God, who works in us both to will and to do; and a good will is essential to salvation. But this good will results from the working of God's mercy, or grace. It is not a condition of the bestowal of that grace.¹⁴⁷

Calvin's doctrine of predestination is conceived in terms of justification.¹⁴⁸ It is quite clear that his doctrine of justification concedes no place for human co-operation. All that is required of those whom God regards as righteous and receives into grace is that they respond to their election, with the justifying faith that works by love. But it is all initiated and carried through by God.¹⁴⁹ His view is paradoxical in this sense – that, although the gospel is to be proclaimed to all, it is not in the strictest sense *for* any except the elect.¹⁵⁰

There are two ways, according to Calvin, in which God achieves this separation. Sometimes, he does not give people the chance to hear the gospel. The other way is that God blinds some of those who hear the gospel. In defence of his doctrine, Calvin draws attention to the many examples in scripture where God hardens men's hearts, notably Pharaoh (Exodus 4:21). He also refers to Christ's teaching in parable – "in order that seeing, they might see, and not perceive, and hearing, they may hear and not understand" (St Matthew 13:13), whereas to the disciples, "it was given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven." Yet Calvin adds that it was still their own fault for not understanding. Even in parables they were given enough light to convict their consciences of ungodliness; but they rejected the light. One may well ask – why does God act in this way – in effect subordinating his love to his sovereignty? Ultimately, because the rejected:

¹⁴⁷ Reid, J.K.S., *op.cit.*, 16.

¹⁴⁸ "The Lord designates his elect by calling and justification, and he designates those who are rejected, by excluding them, either from a knowledge of his name, or from sanctifying of his Spirit." – Calvin, J., *op.cit.*, 3.21.7.

¹⁴⁹ Calvin, J., *op.cit.*, 3.11.2.

¹⁵⁰ See, Sell, A.P.F., *The Great Debate: Calvinism, Arminianism and Salvation*, (West Sussex: H.E. Walter Ltd., 1982), 4.

are raised up by God's inscrutable judgment to illustrate his glory by their condemnation.¹⁵¹¹⁵²

Calvin's final word is to quote Romans 9:20 – "Who are you, O man, to contend with God?"

The lasting influence of Calvin, particularly in Scotland, is due to the Reformed tradition, and, in particular, to the Westminster Confession of Faith. The emphasis on divine sovereignty, linked to a compatibilist understanding of freewill is evident:

God, from all eternity, did by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass; yet so as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.¹⁵³

Donald Macleod, who claims to reject determinism, and considers himself to be a Calvinist and a libertarian at the same time, interprets the Confession as saying that although God foreordains the action of men in coming to moral decisions, he foreordains them as free actions. They are done "by their own personal volition."¹⁵⁴

The Confession also follows Calvin in supporting the *decretum horribile*:

The rest of mankind, God was pleased... to pass by, and to ordain them to dishonour and wrath for their sin.¹⁵⁵

Macleod attempts to soften the hard edge of double predestination, by referring to the element of 'preterition', focusing on the phrase, 'pass by':

He finds them sinners. He passes them by. (St Matthew 11:25). There is a not-revealing. There is a not-enlightening... This sovereign

¹⁵¹ *ibid.*, 3.24.14.

¹⁵² As Walls observes: "Luther and Calvin attempt to vindicate their conception of predestination by appealing to the main principle of the traditional divine command theory of morality: that God's will is the ultimate standard for right and wrong. This requires us to believe that God is right in unconditionally damning whoever he will, even though this deeply offends our sense of justice." – Walls, J., "Divine Commands, Predestination and Moral Intuition", in Pinnock, C.H., (ed.), *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, op.cit., 264-5.

¹⁵³ *Westminster Confession of Faith*, III. 1.

¹⁵⁴ Macleod, D., *A Faith to Live By*, (Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publications, 1998), 42.

¹⁵⁵ *Westminster Confession of Faith*, III. 7.

element in reprobation is not effective or effectuating. It does not change people at all. It leaves them.¹⁵⁶

Macleod confesses to being unhappy about the double decree, as is Calvin himself. He believes that it distorts the biblical perspective, and that there is no theological solution to the dilemma of how to reconcile election and reprobation with the free offer of the gospel. It should also be concluded that Macleod's attempt to combine Calvinism with libertarianism is incoherent. If God has foreordained the moral decisions of humans, they cannot be free.

(f) Opentheism's Reaction to the Augustinian/Calvinist Tradition

The reason why the Augustinian/Calvinist tradition has proved unacceptable to many modern theologians, and in particular to opentheists, must now be examined. Several theologians find Calvin's doctrine unscriptural. Fritz Guy, for example, disputes his interpretation of Romans 8:28-30, on predestination. Calvin describes the double decree as follows:

God's eternal decree, by which he determined with himself, what he willed to become of each man... eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal damnation for others.¹⁵⁷

Guy maintains, however that this is not a case of God imposing his will upon man, but simply a declaration that God is present in every situation, and co-operates with those who have chosen to act with God's love at the centre of their lives.¹⁵⁸

Guy continues to interpret some of the words Paul uses in Romans 8, in ways which are diametrically opposed to Calvin's understanding.¹⁵⁹ 'Foreknow' means "God loves man before man loves God", 'predestine' means "God takes the initiative to remedy the human predicament", and by 'call', Paul means that "God, through the proclamation of the gospel invites human beings collectively and individually, to

¹⁵⁶ Macleod, D., op.cit., 48.

¹⁵⁷ Calvin, J., op.cit., 3.21.5.

¹⁵⁸ Guy, F., "The Universality of God's Love" in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, op.cit., 39.

¹⁵⁹ Calvin's view is in opposition to "the Patristic notion that the hardening of unbelievers takes place through foreknowledge or permission." – Steinmetz, D., *Calvin in Context*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 104, quoting *Institutes*, 2.4.3.

participate in the actualisation of the divine intention for them”¹⁶⁰. Moreover, Guy notes that this predestination takes effect in different ways, depending on whether there is a response in faith. He also draws attention to the vulnerability of God’s love, noting that God’s will can be frustrated by humanity, and that therefore, grace is not irresistible, as Calvin asserts, because it is not the imposition of another’s will, but is in the nature of a free gift which can be rejected.

Cottrell questions the unconditional nature of God’s decree or will in Calvinism, including a specific purpose for every specific moment in creation. Cottrell’s point of view is that most of God’s dealings with specific parts of the universe, such as his foreknowledge, plan of redemption, acts of judgment, and answers to prayer, are conditional.¹⁶¹

This position requires a limitation upon God’s sovereignty, making the world relatively independent of God, in order to leave human beings with an innate power to initiate actions. This freedom includes man’s proneness to sin, for which God makes provision in his plan of redemption. This plan is not predetermined in detail, but is implemented by God in response to human sin. This understanding would appear to be more biblical than a predetermined foreordination which deprives humanity of liberty, and therefore, of moral responsibility. It allows for God to intervene in prudential ways to advance his sovereign purposes.

The idea of a God who interacts in response to human actions also runs in opposition to the immutable, timeless nature of God, as advanced by Augustine. If God sees the entire future because he stands outside time, viewing all of reality in a single eternal moment, this raises the question of whether an utterly changeless being could have perfect knowledge of a changing reality. According to Calvinism, of course, a timeless, immutable being would not require to intervene or respond to the changing flux of worldly events. simply because he would determine the ultimate destiny of every human being, and there would therefore be nothing left for men and women to

¹⁶⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁶¹ Cottrell says – “his foreknowledge is conditioned on the actual occurrence of the events themselves (as foreknown), the entire plan of redemption is conditioned on (is a response to) man’s sin; acts of judgment and wrath, including hell, are likewise conditioned by sin; answers to prayer are conditioned

decide. They would merely fulfil their preassigned roles, and free choice would be an illusion.

Further problems with Calvinism are listed by Rice.¹⁶² These include the difficulty of reconciling it with God's desire to save all people, expressed, for example in 1 Timothy 2:4 and 2 Peter 3:9. Why would the Bible portray God as desiring universal salvation, if he had already decided from all eternity, whom he would elect for salvation, and whom for condemnation? There are also frequent warnings about falling away (1 Corinthians 10:12; Hebrews 6:4-6; 2 Peter 2:20-21), and many calls to repentance (Ezekiel 33:11; St Matthew 3:2; Acts 2:38; 17:30). All of these would be superfluous and meaningless, if destiny is foreordained. Calvinists would, of course, maintain from a compatibilist viewpoint that humans are free to sin, and are therefore culpable, but this is unacceptable to libertarians, as was noted above. Rice also remarks that love involves sensitivity, and that a God of love would be infinitely sensitive to our daily experiences. The classical picture of an impassive God, who does not interact with humans, does not allow for the sensitivity of true love. Again, the Calvinist picture turns out to be unscriptural.

The typical opentheist reaction to Calvinism would be that of Pinnock. He takes issue with the view of divine sovereignty which believes God to have complete control of all things. Pinnock feels that such a view is biblically unjustified and theologically destructive. Pinnock has come to believe that Augustine, heavily influenced by Greek philosophy, had long ago distorted the biblical portrait of a personal, interactive and self-giving God to one of a timeless, changeless, unmoved and unmoveable sovereign. Pinnock is anxious to distance himself from this inert and immobile God, and to substitute for that, a personal agent, who desires loving relationships with fallen creatures, choosing the risks and costs of dynamic give-and-take interaction.¹⁶³

by the prayers themselves (as foreknown). But in all of this, God is no less sovereign than if he had unconditionally predetermined each specific component of the whole." – Cottrell, J., op.cit., 107.

¹⁶² Rice, R., *Divine Foreknowledge and Freewill Theism*, op.cit., 132.

¹⁶³ Barry Callen describes the change in Pinnock's thinking in these words – "In 1970, Pinnock realised that there is a biblically revealed reciprocity between God and the world, which classical theism had diminished. He came to believe that God is interactive with humans in the midst of history, responding to what happens, even altering the divine course of action in response to human actions. He found himself being drawn to love-centred theology that makes room for real human freedom and joyfully affirms a divine providence that is prepared by sovereign choice to take real risks on behalf of ultimate

Another facet of the Augustinian tradition to which Pinnock takes exception is its divine monergism. Augustine believes that sinners are not free to love unless their will is replaced. Pinnock describes this view as sinners being “reprogrammed to respond.” Irresistible grace compels them to have faith, and they cannot respond positively to God because they are not aware of God’s initiative. Pinnock regards it as “salvation without faith.” He rejects the Calvinist claim that grace is irresistible, believing that, while God initiates salvation, “it does not take hold apart from our response.”¹⁶⁴

Critics of Calvin would accuse him of entertaining an unworthy idea of God. Calvin does not believe that reprobation contradicts the love of God, because he could, with equal justice, have condemned the whole race of fallen man. The reprobate, in fact, glorify God by testifying to his justice. Yet, Charles Partee draws attention to Calvin’s failure to resolve “the rational antimony between God’s love (the doctrine of election), and justice (the doctrine of reprobation)”.¹⁶⁵ But, as to the reasons governing God’s election of the chosen ones, and his condemnation of the others, all we can do, in Calvin’s view, is simply and humbly refer to God’s inscrutable wisdom, assured that the cause is “just, though unknown.” It would certainly appear as if Calvin subordinated God’s love to his sovereignty and justice. The unworthiness of this conception has been forcibly expressed by Aubrey Moore. Indeed, he regards it as immoral because it makes the distinction between right and wrong, “a matter of positive enactment.” What would be immoral for man, then becomes “moral for God, because he is above morality.”¹⁶⁶

The doctrine also appears to cast doubt on the significance and efficacy of petitionary prayer. If God’s sovereignty is, as Calvin claims, in complete control of all that happens, is there any point in requesting in prayer that certain results come to pass? Such prayer could, of course, be regarded as a means of accommodating one’s desires to God’s will. Yet, as Partee observes – “it seems both odd and futile to request what

goals.” – Callen, B., *Clark Pinnock: Journey Towards Renewal*, (Nappance, Indiana: Evangel Publishing House, 2000), 115.

¹⁶⁴ Pinnock, C.H., *Flame of Love*, op.cit., 159, 161.

¹⁶⁵ Partee, C., “Calvinism and Determinism,” in Gamble, R.C., (ed.), *An Elaboration of the Theology of Calvin*, op.cit., 352.

¹⁶⁶ Moore, A., *Science and Faith*, cited by Hardman, O., *The Christian Doctrine of Grace*, (London: Unicorn Press, 1960), 143.

will be forthcoming anyway.”¹⁶⁷ Calvin, however, would see prayer as God’s response to his own initiative in the elect.¹⁶⁸

Calvin, would seek to defend his doctrine of predestination, by claiming that it is wholly faithful to scripture, but many would agree with this sentiment of J.S. Whale:

The unflinching logic of double predestination is not typical of scripture taken as a whole. The Bible nowhere directly asserts the *decretum horribile*.¹⁶⁹

(j) The Impact of Libertarianism and Compatibilism on Final Destiny

The question now arises as to whether libertarian freewill is possible after death. Is it possible for the dead to choose between options? This would not be possible if destiny is finalised in this life – a question to be pursued in the next chapter. If it *is* possible, then we have to ask in what circumstances? – would a second chance be given, or would it be confined to a first chance for those deprived of an opportunity in this life? For libertarianism to operate, there would require to be no internal predisposition preventing the agent from a decisive choice. It could be that a hardening of the heart, resulting from habitual wrong-doing, would determine the will, thus preventing a free choice. On the other hand, the encounter with Christ might be so transforming in the afterlife, that a change for the better might prevail in the agent’s soul. Again, however, for libertarian freewill to operate, the revelation arising from a direct encounter with Christ would not require to be so overwhelming that the will was irresistibly determined.

The question might well be asked – Will libertarian freewill be enhanced in the intermediate state? Under the providence of God, the intermediate state will provide, as has been stated earlier, an opportunity for conversion to Christ, for those for whom this has not been possible in their earthly lives. For such an opportunity to be fairly presented, there would require to be fewer counteracting influences, than might obtain on earth, militating against a positive decision for Christ. Circumstances which

¹⁶⁷ Partee, C., “Prayer as the Practice of Predestination” in Gamble, R.C., (ed.) op.cit., 360.

¹⁶⁸ Calvin, J., *Institutes*, 3.20.46.

¹⁶⁹ Whale J.S., *The Protestant Tradition*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), 143.

suggest injustice and undeserved suffering, and which, before death, could encourage rejection of God's love, might well be absent beyond death. Also, any limitation upon libertarian freedom would detract from the moral value of a responsible decision. James F. Sennett has written an article, entitled *Is There Freedom in Heaven?*¹⁷⁰ His conclusion is that there will be compatibilist free actions in heaven. The actions of human agents in heaven will be determined by the agent's character. According to Sennett, libertarianism only applies to actions contributing to the agent's character while here on earth. The contention of this thesis, however, is that enhanced libertarian freedom will be present in the intermediate state, if not in heaven.

The question as to whether God would have foreknowledge of human choices in the afterlife, might not arise if God is timeless, surveying postmortem activity in the intermediate state in one eternal present. The very idea of choice and activity for humans, however, would seem to indicate that, at least for them, temporal categories would still apply, otherwise postmortem spiritual progress would not be possible.

The scriptural evidence advanced above by Rice, illustrating libertarian freedom, implies certain truths about God's attitude towards his creatures. It would be strange, indeed, if the freedom which we enjoy here and now, to love God, were to be cut short at death. It would also be disconcerting if the Heavenly Father, who welcomed back his repentant, prodigal son in our Lord's parable, in this life, were not to afford him a similar opportunity to "come to himself" in the far country of an intermediate state. Also, some human beings are said in St Matthew 21:41-46 and Revelation 20:14-15 to set themselves against God for eternity, but who is to say, that in the changed circumstances of an afterlife whether these humans would be debarred from a change of heart or persist in their intransigence. Surely the God who patiently pursues his objectives for his creatures in this life, will not abandon them as lost causes in the hereafter. God's plans could well be flexible enough to respond to changes in human behaviour. Also, if God's omnipotence means as Pinnock observed above "that God is able to deal with any circumstance that may arise," we can well conceive of the omnipotence continuing to operate – probably with even greater efficacy, in the changed circumstances beyond death. This need not, commit one to a universalist

¹⁷⁰ Sennet, J.F., "Is There Freedom in Heaven?" in *Faith and Philosophy*, vol.16, No.1, Jan.1999.

position, as libertarianism requires that, even beyond death, humans will have the freedom to reject the divine overtures, thus consigning themselves, either to hell, or more probably, to further spiritual diminishment and ultimate annihilation.

The liberty which God allows humans to possess, means that he permits them to sin freely. This liberty must surely persist beyond death, for it is essential if human beings are to be worthy of praise or blame. Our eschatological state will not be that of *non posse peccare*. The conception of a realm where there is no more sin, is a vision of heavenly bliss, rather than that of an intermediate state, where a process of purification will surely be under way. Such is the imperfection which even the best of us feel in this life, that an instantaneous transition at death to a fully perfect state seems highly unlikely. Spiritual growth is a much more gradual process, and for it to take place at all, liberty is a *sine qua non*.

The opentheist belief in the openness and responsiveness of God to human actions has the great advantage that it allows for genuine dialogue between God and ourselves, including his response to our prayers. This point has an important relevance, because it leaves the way open for prayers for the dead. If the final destiny of the unevangelised remains open after death, there must surely be envisaged, not only the possibility, but, indeed, the desirability of prayers being offered for the salvation of those who have died without commitment to Christ. This thought will recur in the final chapter of the thesis in the context of the pastoral opportunities, which will present themselves, when we are called, say, to comfort a bereaved wife on the death of her agnostic or atheistic husband.

Allusion has already been made to various factors in the causation of human actions – Lucas's "causal complex". Lucas gives scriptural evidence for the influence of other people, in decision-making in this life. Neither should the influence of other people, be discounted in the afterlife. There must surely be a social dimension to life in the intermediate state. In a recent essay, Miroslav Volf argues that, if the world to come is

to be a world of love, then, it must have “an inter-human side.” It will be part of the work of the Spirit to effect “the final social reconciliation.”¹⁷¹

He imagines, for example, a meeting of Cain and Abel in the world to come, and what would need to happen before a reconciliation could take place. Volf’s thesis refers to the final consummation, and he makes no mention of an intermediate state, but the reservations already expressed about instantaneous sanctification would apply also to inter-human reconciliation. In an intermediate state with countless humans still “on the way” with their spiritual development, there would obviously be much work to be done. It would appear likely, that as God has enlisted his Church to prosecute his mission here on earth, so he will continue to enlist believers in the ongoing work of conversion in the world to come., and this will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6 below. Nevertheless, there is no way in which the influence of others could be determinative, if the agent is to be held morally responsible, as Swinburne observed above.

If moral responsibility depends, as has been suggested, on libertarian freedom, the issues of right and wrong must be clearly distinguished and presented. It could well be that, although humans, according to Romans 1, have an innate sense of moral judgment, the cultural and religious environment surrounding an agent in this life, may have dulled his moral sensitivity (his conscience) – hence the need for a clearer challenge in an intermediate state where moral responsibility can be more fairly apportioned.

The goal of creation, as envisaged by Ward and Polkinghorne, was seen to involve:

the generation of communities of free, self-aware, self-directing sentient beings, capable of conscious relationship to the creator.¹⁷²

It is difficult to imagine this goal being realised on this earth. The evidence of history reveals an ongoing state of affairs where rampant evil continues to flourish alongside

¹⁷¹ Volf, M., “The Final Reconciliation: Reflections on a Social Dimension of the Eschatological Transition,” in Buckley, J., and Jones, L.G., (eds.), *Theology and Eschatology at the Turn of the Millennium*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 92.

¹⁷² See n.51 above.

the good. Indeed, our Lord's teaching in the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares leads us to expect that this will always be the case. The ultimate goal, therefore, would seem to call for an otherworldly consummation through the medium of an intermediate state.

In turning from libertarianism to consider compatibilism in the context of final destiny – there is little that can be said about either physical or psychological determinism. It is idle to speculate on physical laws which would be completely different in the world to come. Psychological determinism would be equally problematical – certainly as regards environmental conditioning, as the other world's environment could be unrecognisable after this world. Genetic conditioning, however, might have a part to play, as even with the new creation of spiritual bodies, there must be some continuing link to preserve personal identity. The type of determinism, however, which has the greatest relevance, is theological. Soft determinism might be relevant, as we would carry forward our characters and dispositions into the future life. If, however, the intermediate state is to be a sphere of continuing progress, then we shall require to be free to make decisions which may conflict with our characters and inherited dispositions. For this, we would require libertarian freedom.

It could be that Dennett's compatibilist insight into "the communal activity of mutual persuasion, reflection and instruction, creating values that take precedence over the cruder instincts of our ancestors"¹⁷³ may impact upon postmortem development, and decision-making. But although, as has just been explained, the influence of others may be of importance in the afterlife, the requirements of moral responsibility mean that the crucial decisions must be "up to" the individual. Dennett was unable to pin down the origination of the power to will our actions, and alluded to the mysterious entity, the "active self." It would appear that it is this very entity which must survive death, and be capable of further improvement, the entity which traditionally has been called "the soul". Dennett also says that "the more talented we are, the more we are able to control our destiny". The interesting possibility suggests itself that the God who has endowed some people with ten talents and others with only one, may, in a future life, re-allocate our talents on a more equitable basis! Dennett's claim is that the only kind

¹⁷³ Dennett, D., *Elbow Room*, op.cit., 46.

of freewill “worth wanting” is where we want agents to be free, capable of initiating and taking responsibility for projects and deeds. The final destiny of the unevangelised would require them to be agents in this sense, although it might be preferable to qualify Dennett’s statement by saying that the initiating would come as a response to God’s grace, without being determined by it.

Honderich’s “life-hopes”, where he argues for an open (indeterministic) future, rather than a closed (deterministic) one, has an obvious relevance to the theme. It is to be hoped, indeed, that the unevangelised would be able in Honderich’s words – “to rise above the conditioning and influence of the past to produce something new by our own efforts”¹⁷⁴. Kane, building on Honderich’s views, lists a number of goods, which are assured, if indeterminism rather than determinism is true – many of them relevant to questions of final destiny. Included among these are the sense of individuality and uniqueness peculiar to the person, if his actions are not determined. It would certainly be true, that if an unevangelised person is to be saved, it would require, on his part, an individual decision, independent of conditioning influences external to the agent. There is also a certain dignity or worthiness, which a person aspiring to salvation would hope to achieve, and which God, and other humans ought to feel able to accord to him. Also, as already indicated in the context of scriptural references to ‘love’, love and friendship only attain their value in an environment where they are undetermined and spontaneous. Such love would be one of the hall-marks of an advanced state of spiritual maturity in an intermediate state. As “God is love”, the more clearly one can respond to God with an answering devotion, freely given, the closer one advances to the complete fellowship of love in heaven.

Kane’s perplexity about how thoughts and efforts of will can at the same time be physical processes of the brain is compounded by St Paul’s imaginative concept of the “spiritual body” with which God may endow us in the new creation after death.

In considering Anglin’s compatibilist understanding of “metachoice” in the choice of values, it was concluded that choosing values is a matter of transcending one’s previous values, culture and any other determining factors. This has an obvious

¹⁷⁴ Honderich, T., *op.cit.*, 22.

connection with the final destiny of the unevangelised, who will normally be called upon to commit themselves to Christ despite, and, indeed, often in opposition to, the values and culture, which have prevented an encounter with Christ in this life. Such a change in the choice of values would presuppose libertarian freewill.

The compatibilist position becomes even more inopportune for final destiny, when it emphasises, as in the thought of Vivian, the moulding influence of the climate of opinion in surrounding society. If we are, as he avers, "to a large extent, prisoners of our environment", one would have to hope that the postmortem environment for the unevangelised would be so different, as to enable them to break free from their former prisons! Also, if most of their virtuous actions were motivated by their acquired dispositions or characters, as Vivian also believes, one would need to hope that the changed environment of the intermediate state would enable them to act 'out of' and 'above' their previous characters.

Swinburne's opinion that character does not determine an agent's choice, but simply makes certain choices easy and others hard, is much more conducive to the postmortem opportunities, which will sometimes require individuals to choose between desires of equal strength, or indeed resist desire altogether, and do what they believe is more worthwhile.

It is time, next, to consider the impact of theological determinism in the Augustinian/Calvinist tradition upon thoughts of final destiny. Augustine, as noted above, believes that, without grace, fallen man lacks the ability to choose righteousness. This position would straightaway rule out of court, the view that the unevangelised might be saved by responding favourably to such light as they have received in this life. They would require to encounter the grace of God in a postmortem encounter with Christ. This, however, would not be possible in the Augustinian system, where, immediately after death, one's eternal destiny is fixed. Augustine's belief is that guilty souls are enclosed in a place of torture; the just in regions of repose and happiness. In the interval which separates death from resurrection, souls are either tortured, or find rest, according to what they did on this earth. This period "contains souls in hidden places of rest or anguish, as each one

merits". ¹⁷⁵Augustine does believe in the existence of purgatory, just as his teacher, Ambrose, does, distinguishing so clearly, the fire of purgatory from that of hell. ¹⁷⁶The teaching of a period of expiation after death is clearly linked in Augustine's thought to prayers for the departed.

The real divergence between the Augustinian/Calvinist tradition and this thesis is uncovered by the doctrine of predestination. According to Augustine, God prepares some – the elect – for the truth, and others not. He would presumably, therefore, number the unevangelised among the non-elect. Augustine would reject the charge that God was unjustly depriving them of the opportunity for salvation. Those, in his view, to whom the faith was never preached at all were those God knew would not believe. It would be possible to hold this belief, only if one believed in God's foreordination. If humans had freedom to choose without determination of their wills by God, then God would not know in advance, whether they would believe or not. If God foreordains that millions reject him, he would appear to be depriving them of the opportunity to hear the gospel, because of accidents (although Augustine would not regard that word as appropriate!) of history or geography. This would appear to be flagrantly unjust.

As noted above, Calvin stands squarely in the Augustinian tradition. God's sovereignty, for Calvin, is total, and, therefore, the final destiny of the unevangelised is fixed from all eternity. Even if one were to grant Calvin's compatibilist contention that humans are free to choose, such freedom is illusory, and the fate of the unevangelised would be sealed from day One. What the unevangelised need most of all is the restoration of the freedom to live before God in a way which would enable them to receive God's greatest gift – salvation. This is precisely what they are prevented from receiving, because the special grace needed for regeneration is reserved for the elect. That the non-elect should be singled out for condemnation, quite irrespective of their deserts, seems quite unjust. The idea that God permits the sinner, in effect, to sign his own death warrant, seems to be particularly pernicious, when, in his omnipotence, God could easily intervene to direct the sinner's will in another direction. It would leave God with the ultimate responsibility for the damnation of

¹⁷⁵ Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 109.29.

millions – as he either deprives some of the opportunity to hear the gospel, or, if they do hear it, blinds them to its significance.

The modern Calvinist, Loraine Boettner, advances the very doubtful argument that:

if God had intended to save them (the unevangelised), he would have sent them the means of salvation.¹⁷⁷

But this need not be so. God might either save some by their response in this life to such light as they received, or provide them with a postmortem saving encounter with Christ. But the former of these alternatives is clearly rejected by the Westminster Confession of Faith which, after stating that those who reject Christ cannot be saved, adds:

Much less can men, not professing the Christian religion, be saved in any other way whatsoever, be they never so diligent to frame their lives according to the light of nature, and the law of that religion they do profess.¹⁷⁸

Boettner then proceeds to make a grudging concession with the view that if the heathens are lost “they shall suffer relatively less than those who heard and rejected the gospel (Lk. 10:12-14; 12:47-48).” But he then describes the condemnation of the non-elect as meant “to furnish an external exhibition before men and angels, of God’s hatred for sin.”¹⁷⁹

This is a singularly unattractive idea, suggesting, as it does, that God would use the heathen as a means to an end – the publicising of his justice, thus making them an example for the deterrence of others.

Calvin himself, is uncommunicative on the possibility of an intermediate state, saying:

¹⁷⁶ Ambrose, *Expositio in Psalmum*, 118, sermon 3,17.

¹⁷⁷ Boettner, Loraine, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1957), 117.

¹⁷⁸ *Westminster Confession of Faith*, X.4.

¹⁷⁹ Boettner, L., *op.cit.*, 191, 121.

It is not right to enquire into the state or place of souls between death and resurrection. It is sufficient to know that the souls of believers 'retire' into blessed rest, where they await happily and joyfully, the fruition of the promised glory.¹⁸⁰

The conclusion of this chapter must be that the Augustinian/Calvinist tradition holds out no hope for the salvation of the unevangelised; overemphasises the sovereignty of God at the expense of human freewill, and fails to express adequately the justice, love and mercy of God. The libertarian understanding of human freedom is to be preferred to the compatibilist view, as it enables a person to transcend the determinism of character and disposition. The opentheist contention that God limits his sovereignty, and interacts with the free response of humans, adapting his plans accordingly, appears to be best suited to a positive outcome for the final destiny of the unevangelised.

The thesis argues that libertarian freewill continues into postmortem existence, but how will the unrighteous and the unevangelised respond? Will there be further opportunities of salvation for those who rejected Christ in this life, and what will be the ultimate fate of the stubbornly impenitent? These questions lead the discussion in the direction of a study of universalism and conditional immortality.

178. Calvin, J., *op.cit.*, 3.2.25-6

CHAPTER 6

UNIVERSALISM AND ITS ALTERNATIVES

(a) The Value of Libertarian Freedom

One of the main attractions of opentheism in the promotion of this thesis is the scope which it gives to the individual, either to respond to the grace of God in Christ by accepting the offer of salvation, or to reject this offer. This becomes possible when the individual possesses libertarian freedom. The traditional Augustinian/Calvinist position is unacceptable, because it leaves the destiny of the individual entirely in the hands of God, who predestines some of his creatures to salvation and others to condemnation. Divine election of this kind removes from the creature the dignity of moral responsibility. While it is true, as Augustinians assert, that all humans sin and are therefore guilty, the fact that some can be regenerated through divine election, while others cannot, reduces humans to the level of pawns under the control of a divine chess-player. No virtue can then be attributed to the human being. The view put forward in this thesis may be criticised as synergism, but it is important to retain choice for the individual. Even if, the initiative in conversion is taken by God in his gracious overtures to the person, and, even if the person's faith is itself a gift of God, the response of accepting in faith must be freely taken, without external compulsion.

It appears that a God who limits his omnipotence in this way, as opentheists claim, in order to encourage human response is a more admirable God than one who exercises his almighty power in an irresistible, manipulative manner. It is also much more in keeping with the nature of a God who is Love. An essential and obvious characteristic of love – whether human or divine – is that it does not compel a response, but rather seeks to win a free response. These considerations would appear to apply especially to the death of Christ upon the Cross. The crucifixion directs its appeal to the heart. Indeed, if the final decision in determining human destiny lay with irresistible election by an omnipotent God, there would seem to be little point in a divine plan which required the crucifixion of God's Son. The question – "Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by?" could only be given one answer – "Precisely nothing". The paramount

will of an almighty manipulator could effect the separation of the elect from the non-elect without the appeal of suffering love directed at human hearts.

The requirement of a completely free human response raises questions regarding the circumstances which would need to obtain in order to allow such a response to be made. This thesis asserts, as a basic truth, the finality of Christ as the sole source of salvation. Inclusivists maintain that the unevangelised may be saved by responding to such light as God affords them through general revelation, or through conscience. It is maintained here, however, that the freedom to choose good rather than evil, while it would indicate that the individual was heading in the right direction, could never equate to the experience of repentance, following upon judgment of sin at the foot of the Cross, and the surrender of the heart and will issuing in the individual's rebirth. Nor does the kind of faith in the reality of God to be found in the beliefs of faithful devotees of the other great world religions seem to present the same depth of challenge as that posed by the life and death of Christ. Accidents of history and geography often prevent the non-Christian believer from making the kind of well-informed choice which truly libertarian freedom requires. Similar factors also restrict the freedom of the unevangelised, living in a Christian or post-Christian society, as will be noted in the following chapter, when the kind of social deprivation which can militate against a truly free acceptance of Christ as Saviour, is described.

It is for these reasons that the likelihood of postmortem evangelism should be promoted, when God may make available to the unevangelised the kind of opportunity to respond to Christ which they have been denied in this life. A number of related questions then arise. First, will the postmortem environment be suitable for an individual to make free choices beyond death? This would not be possible if the only postmortem existence could be described as a kind 'soul-sleep' as in Lutheran thought. The individual would require to have all his or her mental and spiritual faculties wide awake. A number of Pauline passages, for example, Phil 1:23, would imply that this would be so. What would be the point of 'being with Christ' if one's soul was to be asleep? There would be consciousness, although perhaps to a reduced extent, compared with the eventual sensitivities of the final state of heavenly existence. It is also difficult to imagine free decisions being taken by a disembodied soul. Paul should, therefore, be followed when he envisages the deceased 'putting on'

meaning of *aionios* ('eternal'), in, for example, Matt. 25:46 where, at the conclusion of his Parable of the Sheep and the Goats, Jesus says of the unrighteous – "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life." Packer also refers to its use in 2 Thess. 1:9 – "everlasting destruction." Packer claims that *aionios* means 'fixity' and 'finality', that is to say, 'endlessness'.³ He also refers to its use in Rev. 20:10, with reference to the devil, the beast and the false prophet being "tormented day and night for ever and ever", commenting that it "is presumably the knowledge of God's own ill-desert and displeasure, and of the good that one has lost."⁴

These texts, in Packer's opinion, speak of continued existence in an experience of retribution. Packer also claims that *apollumi* does not mean 'annihilation'. Here, he is following the opinion of R.A. Morey, who draws this conclusion from the rabbinic meaning of the word, its lexicographical significance, and the way the New Testament uses it.⁵

Supporters of this position are in the habit of inserting the word 'conscious' into their description of everlasting punishment. This is unwarranted and inadmissible. Matt. 25:46 can be interpreted to mean 'irreversible destruction' rather than 'everlasting, conscious torment',⁶ and this is certainly to be preferred. Despite Morey's lexicographical evidence, it should be held that if 'destruction' is an accurate translation of *apollumi*, it is much closer to common parlance in English to understand its meaning as 'non-existence'.⁷ In regard to interpretation of *aionios*, annihilationists, who assert that it communicates the idea of 'that which pertains to the age to come', and that the "adjective refers to an eternal result of the punishment rather than an incessant process." would appear to be right.⁸ Passages in the Book of Revelation which can be understood as describing an endless condition of torment are also open

³ Packer, J.I., *Celebrating the Saving Work of God*, (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1998), 165.

⁴ *ibid.*, 174.

⁵ Morey, R.A., *Death and the Afterlife*, (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1984), 90.

⁶ See, for example, Pinnock, C.H., 'The Destruction of the Finally Impenitent,' in *Criswell Theological Review*, 4, Sept. 1990, 256.

⁷ This is John Stott's view "It would seem strange...if people who are said to suffer destruction, are in fact not destroyed; and...it is difficult to imagine a perpetually inconclusive process of perishing". – Stott, John and Edwards, David L., *A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1988, 315-6.

⁸ Morgan, C., *Jonathan Edwards and Hell*, (Tain: Christian Focus Publications, 2004), 59.

to other interpretations. For example, when John says that worshippers of the beast “will be tormented with burning sulphur...And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever”, the reference could be to the moment of their judgment, not their everlasting condition with the smoke going up forever being testimony to their final destruction.⁹

Augustine’s belief in endless, retributive punishment has a major influence on medieval Western theology¹⁰ – for example, on Aquinas – and the principal Protestant reformers, Luther and Calvin follow in the same tradition. It should also be noted that the Arminian, John Wesley, also strongly supports eternal, conscious punishment. Modern exponents of the traditional view lay emphasis upon a God who justly demands that unredeemed sin be punished, and because God is infinitely good, that means that the sin merits endless retribution. Some affirm belief in eternal, conscious spiritual torment rather than physical suffering,¹¹ and suggest that to be estranged from God for ever, could in fact be worse than to endure endless, physical punishment. Yet another group refuse to speculate on the detailed workings of hell, and confine themselves to the belief that hell connotes eternal separation from God.¹² Human beings are created for communion with God, and this is the heart of salvation and the gospel. To lack such communion is to find oneself in hell, estranged from the love of God. This view is the main emphasis of C.S. Lewis’s allegory of salvation and damnation, entitled *The Great Divorce*, which concentrates on ‘privation’ from the love of God, rather than on endless torture or extinction.¹³

The traditional view appears to be unacceptable because it proposes the view that the God revealed in the person and teaching of Jesus, would permit unrepentant sinners to

⁹ Pinnock, op.cit., 257.

¹⁰ Augustine expresses a parallelism between eternal life and eternal punishment as follows – “How absurd it is to interpret eternal punishment as meaning merely a fire of long duration, while believing eternal life to signify life without end... The phrases are parallel: eternal punishment; eternal life. To say in the same context, ‘Eternal life will be without end; eternal punishment will have an end’, is utterly ridiculous. Hence, since the eternal life of the saints will be without end, the eternal punishment of those who incur it, will, without doubt, be endless.” (*City of God*, XXI, 23, 1000-2.) He also rejects the view that eternal punishment is unjustly disproportionate to any crime committed in the finite context of life on earth, because all human beings are implicated in the universal sin of Adam. (ibid., XXI, 12, 988-9).

¹¹ For example, Anthony Hoekema, Murray Harris and Peter Toon.

¹² For example, Kendall Harmon, Alec Motyer and Peter Head.

languish in the torture chamber of hell.¹⁴ The traditional view appears to subordinate God's love to his justice, whereas it seems more probable that his justice is an aspect of his love. No matter how recalcitrant sinners may be, God in his loving mercy has forgiven them – and this is the gospel of the Cross. The witness of the Bible, outlined above, favours conditional immortality, rather than the traditional view.¹⁵ It is not inconsistent with God's love that the impenitent are annihilated, either straight after they have been resurrected, and judged, or, more probably, after a time of purgative punishment in an intermediate state. The annihilation of evildoers could also have the effect of freeing the universe of all evil, which would appear to be the contention of some Pauline passages often quoted by universalists.

One of the attractive features of conditionalism for this thesis is the recognition which it gives to the possession by human beings of free-will. It is the fact that God has given us the power to choose, which opens up the possibility of final rejection of God's offer of salvation, and which may lead to annihilation.¹⁶ The suggestion has been made that when God intervenes to allow an impenitent sinner to die, this may be tantamount to a violation of human freedom, because the sinner may prefer to remain in hell, rather

¹³ Lewis, C.S., *The Great Divorce*, op, cit.

¹⁴ John W. Wenham is a prominent conditionalist who puts his finger upon the main difference between conditionalism and the traditional view – “It shares the doctrine of judgment held by the upholders of everlasting torment in almost every particular – except for one tremendous thing: it sees no continuing place in God's world for human beings living on in unending pain, not reconciled to God. The wrath of God will put an end to sin and evil.” – Wenham, J.W., “The Case for Conditional Immortality” in Cameron N. M.de S., (ed.), *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell*, (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1992), 162.

¹⁵ This is also the view of Donald Baillie who maintains that – “The idea of everlasting punishment need not imply that any one individual will remain forever in that torment; in any case, a dogma should not be built upon parabolic and apocalyptic foundations.” – Baillie, D.M., “The Kingdom of God and the Christian Hope” in unpublished lectures (1954).

¹⁶ Archbishop William Temple gives forcible expression to the fact of human freedom – “God so longs for a freely offered life that he risks the loss involved in a choice which brings perdition. Because he is love, he made us free; because we are free, we may choose to perish...The New Testament certainly teaches that, on the choice of every will, an infinite issue lies. The question at stake is not of less or more, nor one of sooner or later; it is one of life or death. And it is good for us that it should be so. It is bracing to the will, that it should have real responsibility; and of this, a dogmatic universalism would deprive it.” – *Christus Veritas*, (London: Macmillan, 1924), 209.

Wheeler Robinson also identifies human freedom as a key issue, involved in questions of ultimate destiny. After reviewing the alternatives to universalism and everlasting suffering for the impenitent, and acknowledging that a case can be made out for both on the grounds of scripture and reason, he believes a “revised form of conditional immortality can make the best case for itself.” The issue of one's final destiny, he avers, is bound up with freedom, because – “If, according to his (God's) purpose, the right use of freedom is necessary for the attainment of eternal life, then the wrong use of freedom, if *permanent*, must forfeit it. We cannot assert that all men will or will not turn to God; how do we know what use personality will make of its freedom under entirely new conditions.” – Robinson, H. Wheeler, *Redemption and Revelation*, (London: Nisbit, 1942), 310.

than have his life terminated.¹⁷ A more likely scenario would be a situation where a sinner's life comes to an end through spiritual deterioration, resulting from his own evil choices, without any infringement of free-will through divine intervention.¹⁸ The radically wicked simply cease to be; they have lapsed into non-being. At the end-time, there will be a resurrection to eternal life for the virtuous, but for the wicked, death will mean final extinction. This notion of conditionalism has much to commend it, because it avoids the choice between universalism and unending hell. Opponents, of a universalist persuasion would, of course, criticise it, on the grounds that it amounts, they would aver, to God abandoning sinners to their fate, a view which they find morally unacceptable. Important support for conditionalism over against either universalism or eternal torment is provided by the Doctrinal Commission of the Church of England, although it finally comes to an agnostic conclusion.¹⁹

The traditional belief that God decrees from all eternity, that some are predestined to salvation, and others to damnation, is quite unacceptable to opentheists, who maintain the universality of God's intention to save all of humanity, as expressed in texts like 2 Pet. 3:9 and 1 Tim. 2:4. The atonement is not limited as in Calvinist thinking, but universal in its outreach, although particular in its efficacy. Opentheists also react with

¹⁷ This suggestion is made by W.S. Anglin in *Free Will and the Christian Faith*, op.cit., 179. Intervention by God is also alluded to as a possibility by R.R. Cook who explores the relationship between rejection of the gospel in this life, and the human will. He notes that people may refuse the offer of salvation because of a weak will, or because of an impotent will, and that the weak-willed soul might be tempted – “to procrastinate forever, unless God made clear that the offer of salvation is not open-ended. The warning that one day God will withdraw his offer could be perceived as a loving act.” – Cook, R.R., “Is Universalism an Implication of the Notion of Postmortem Evangelism?” in *Tyndale Bulletin*, 45 (1994), 408.

¹⁸ Keith Ward quotes C.S. Lewis's description in *The Great Divorce* of such people as “men who have been so engrossed with themselves, that their personalities have gradually shrivelled, and grown totally self-enclosed, until, in the end, they wither away as personalities.” Ward, K., *Ethics and Christianity*, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1970), 260. Lewis's position is also clarified in *The Problem of Pain*. He believes that souls in hell may leave, if they wish. In a memorable phrase, he describes the doors of hell as “locked on the inside”. But the wish that they might have to escape is weak because – “they certainly do not will even the first preliminary stages of that self-abandonment, through which the soul can reach any good. They enjoy forever the horrible freedom they have demanded, and are therefore self-enclosed.” – Lewis, C.S., *The Great Divorce*, op.cit., 115-6.

Kallistos Ware comments on the opinion of anti-universalists that there is a point of no return, after which repentance becomes impossible – “God does not deprive the damned of their freedom, but the misuse of their freedom becomes eventually so deep-rooted in them that they cannot thereafter change, and thus remain fixed forever in their attitude of rejection. God has not ceased to love them, but they have rendered themselves incapable of ever again responding to that love.” Ware, K., *The Inner Kingdom*, (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2000), 213.

¹⁹ The Doctrinal Commission of the Church of England: *The Mystery of Salvation*, (London: Church House Publishing, 1995), 115-6

revulsion to the view that hell means everlasting torture for the damned.²⁰ They hold, surely correctly, that eternal torment would be vindictive, and completely out of keeping with the love of God. They also maintain that if there were to be endless impenitence of the damned in hell, this would mean that Christ had not won the victory over sin and death. The biblical picture, they maintain, is that Satan and all other enemies have been consumed in the lake of fire and the Second Death.²¹ The opentheist views, arise out of their picture of God's nature, and of how he relates to his creatures. This relationship is sometimes described as 'the fellowship model.'²² In the covenant relationship between Jehovah and Israel, there is a pattern of withdrawal and return like that of a mother interacting with her child, in order that the child might respond and develop. It can also be compared to the relationship between lovers and marriage partners. Each has a part to play, and choices to make, as in marriage. The initiative, of course, lies with God in his grace, but his grace does not manipulate or determine our response, since we are able to accept or refuse it. This marks a further departure from the Augustinian/Calvinist tradition, because opentheists maintain that we are saved by grace through faith – the grace is not irresistible. Opentheists – particularly Pinnock, lay great stress upon the 'faith principle' which is soundly based on scriptural texts like Gen. 15:6 and Heb. 11:6 – "And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him, must believe that he exists, and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him." Sinners require to consent and yield to God's persuasion, but the love of God is seen as empowering rather than overpowering. Here, once again, there is a significant departure from traditional theology. Augustine, followed by Luther, is of the opinion that sinners are not able, of themselves, to respond to God, because they are dead in their sins. (Eph. 2:1). They require regeneration first, which then enables them to respond. They cannot believe, before this, because of the bondage of the will. But this is tantamount to salvation without faith, rather than salvation by grace through faith. Opentheists see this as faith programmed by irresistible grace.²³ It is immediately obvious that the gift by God to

²⁰ They hold that sensitive people (in Pinnock's words) – "cannot accept that God would subject anyone, even most corrupt sinners, to unending torture, in both body and soul, as Augustine and Jonathan Edwards taught. If that is what hell means, many will conclude that there should not be a doctrine of hell in Christian theology." – Pinnock, C.H., *A Wideness in God's Mercy*, op.cit., 157.

²¹ Pinnock, C.H. in Crockett, W. (ed.), *Four Views on Hell*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1992), 154.

²² Sanders, J. "God as Personal" in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, op.cit., 177.

²³ Pinnock, C.H. *Flame of Love*, op.cit., 159.

his creatures of free-will is of vital importance to opentheists. The love of God is more fundamental than his control, and so he creates human beings with moral freedom. This is a risky strategy for God, because he is then vulnerable to the possible misuse by humans of their freedom. While it is still possible for everyone to be saved, people have a genuine choice, and God's love can be ignored or spurned. When the offer of salvation is rejected, hell is a possible outcome, and the fate of impenitent sinners, if they persist in rejecting the offer of salvation, is, in opentheist eyes, annihilation.²⁴ The final destiny of some of the unevangelised, if they persistently reject postmortem offers of salvation, could therefore lead to spiritual deterioration and eventual extinction.

(d) Is the Final Decision on Human Destiny Taken in this Life?

Within the time-span covered by the New Testament, the expectation of the parousia begins to fade, and, with it, the idea of a second judgment. The popular Christian view which emerges is that each person, as he or she dies, goes to heaven, (either directly or via purgatory), or to hell. The judgment of the individual at death becomes indistinguishable from the final judgment at the end of the world, and therefore the destiny of the soul is decided at the hour of death. One either dies after having repented, and goes to heaven in a state of grace, or, if one is still impenitent, one goes to hell. The exposition of this argument by restrictivists, such as Nash, in their opposition to postmortem evangelism, has already been discussed in Chapter 4.

Such a view, however, appears to devalue the soul. To believe that, at death, some are elected for eternal life, while others are doomed to eternal death, would imply that no further moral improvement is possible after death. It seems much more likely that, as most of us fall far short of perfection when we die, there will be further stages and methods of spiritual growth in an intermediate state. As life here and now is a vale of soul-making, the experience of education, so incomplete here, will fructify hereafter. The fate of the soul will therefore not be finally determined at death. Furthermore, if

²⁴ Pinnock is always anxious to ground his views on scripture, and so he quotes with approval the New Testament scholar, E.G. Selwyn's advocacy of annihilationism – "There is little, indeed, in the New Testament, to suggest a state of everlasting punishment, but much to indicate an ultimate destruction or dissolution of those who cannot enter into life: conditional immortality seems to be the doctrine most

death itself is the guillotine which lops off all opportunity for further moral and spiritual development, this would mean that death is stronger than God's love and grace, particularly in those cases where that love and grace has not had sufficient opportunity before death to appeal to the soul. All that we know of moral and spiritual progress suggests that death will make very little difference, for it will scarcely interrupt the continuity of growth and progress. There is no sudden leap at death, either into perfection, or hopeless damnation.

In rejecting the Augustinian view that the individual faces at death the definitive, divine judgment, account is being taken of modern biological, psychological and sociological knowledge. That is to acknowledge that a person's state of soul at death is considerably influenced by his inherited inclinations, and by his family and social environment. These factors, while not determining his character, can seriously reduce his freedom of choice. Final determination of his destiny should therefore await his experience of a postmortem existence where the limiting effect of these factors can be counteracted. The fulfilment of God's purpose for that life would require its prolongation beyond the confines of this life. It would also be difficult to understand the redemptive work of Christ, if death is an arbitrary cut-off point in the destiny of the soul. Scriptural passages such as Lk. 23:43 and Phil. 1:23 suggest that a deceased soul journeys forward in the continuing presence of Christ. If, as Scripture assures us, "he *ever* lives to make intercession for us", it would seem strange indeed, and, in fact, contradictory to believe that the onset of death would bring Christ's redemptive work to a sudden, and, in countless cases, an unsuccessful end.

The history of religious thought outwith the Augustinian/Calvinist tradition, would seem to give strong indication that death itself does not determine final destiny. This is so, because of three attempts which have been made in different periods to overcome the sharp polarity of the 'double outcome' at death. These are 'reincarnation', belief in an 'intermediate state' and 'purgatory'. All three express the feeling that one cannot make the moment of death decisive for ultimate destiny. Where infants die prematurely, such a final cut-off point would be a complete absurdity. The arbitrariness of making death the final judgment reveals itself when one considers the

consonant with the teaching of Scripture." – Selwyn, E.G., *The First Epistle of Peter*, (London:

a spiritual body at death, rather than waiting for a reunion of soul and body at the parousia.

It is also of value to speculate on the likelihood of the unevangelised being required to take the final postmortem decision on destiny, while in fellowship with other humans. Too often questions of final destiny appear to focus on the individual on his or her own. A decision for Christ cannot be taken apart from one's horizontal relationships with other humans. J.A.T. Robinson in his assertion about postmortem membership in the Body of Christ, as part of what it means to have a 'spiritual body', goes too far. It is true, however, that how the individual soul relates to other souls would influence the eventual decision affecting one's destiny. The idea that Christ might be assisted by other postmortem evangelists is an attractive one, and here, one recalls C.S. Lewis's speculation along these lines in *The Great Divorce*.¹

The major influence bearing in upon the one making the decision, would, of course, be Christ's. One might wonder how an approach from the risen, exalted Christ might affect the freedom of the human response. It would still be of cardinal importance that the manifestation of Christ was not so blindingly overpowering that the freedom of the individual's response was inhibited. One would imagine that, although we shall still 'see through a glass darkly' but not quite so darkly as we do here, God will ensure that the decision will still require to be made in faith rather than by sight.

As Chapter 5 indicated, the role which character plays in moral choices is crucial. It is important that the deceased retains his or her identity in the life to come. Some souls will therefore carry into the future life the desire and predisposition to sin. What chance, then, is there for that soul's inclination to change? One would think that in the case of those who never encountered Christ in this life, there would be a real chance of improvement and ennobling of character resulting from a first encounter with Christ. On the other hand, it is possible that an evil soul may be so habituated and fixed in its ways that change for the better is ruled out. This eventually would explain Swinburne's 'lost souls', or Lewis's 'shrivelled souls', or indeed, 'remains'. The soul

¹ "The Solid People have come further for the sake of the Ghosts than ye can understand...Everyone of them has interrupted that journey and retraced immeasurable distances to come down today on the mere chance of saving some Ghost."- Lewis, C.S., *The Great Divorce*, (London: Harper Collins, 1946),

may be so far removed from the appeal of goodness, the character so ingrained by evil ways, that even exposure to the holy love of Christ, fails to bring about any amelioration. The key question here is whether the power of divine love overmasters the human will, or the human will, in its freedom, retains the sinful hardening of heart which makes it impervious to the overtures of divine love. Universalists will say that the former is true.

(b) The Doctrine of the Second Chance

The possibility of repeated approaches by Christ to the unevangelised in the intermediate state opens up the scenario of 'second chances'. This is a different question from what happens when an unevangelised person meets Christ in the afterlife for the first time – that would be a 'first chance'. Consideration, however, must be given to the case of someone who, in this life, made a decision to reject Christ. It could be that his decision was due to inadequate proclamation of the gospel, or to the experiences of life predisposing him to doubt, or to the prevailing influence of other people militating against faith. Even Christians, in this life, sometimes fail to make an absolute choice, hovering between love of God, and love of themselves. Also, there are those who might have become saintly, if they had lived longer.

The idea of a 'second chance' goes right back to Marcion and Origen in the Early Church, and to Schleiermacher, Dorner, Godet and others in more recent times. The possibility, not simply of a 'second chance', but of a whole succession of chances, is supported by modern theologians, like Leslie Weatherhead and Fredrick Levison. The Jehovah's Witnesses also maintain this view, but it is rejected by many theologians of conservative views. The chief arguments for it are general considerations about divine love and justice; the position defended by texts like John 3:18,36 that conscious, deliberate unbelief in Jesus is the only legitimate ground for condemnation, and so, those, at least, who have never heard of Christ, or have not seriously considered him, ought to have another chance; and texts like Matt. 12:32 and 1 Pet.3:19 and 4:6, which can be interpreted as teaching probation after death.

A God of love would surely wish to give his creatures all possible opportunities to become the persons he wants us to be, to return to our life, so that in the light of his

grace and in the power of his mercy we could put right what had gone wrong, finish what was uncompleted, forgiving trespasses against us and healing hurts. Indeed, it could be said that there can be no maturity without further chances of moral and spiritual growth. As long as a person has the faintest perception of an ideal which is higher than that expressed in his own life, there is the chance of reformation. There can be no such thing as a static soul. Postmortem existence will be something like ascending or descending a ladder. As it is likely that free-will is still possessed by souls after death, there will be many choices still to be made. The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Lk. 16:19-31) is often quoted to show that the gulf between saved and unsaved cannot be bridged after death, but it has also been used to show that there can be postmortem progress. Even the rich man in his torment showed concern for his brothers, to warn them of their possible fate, whereas at the beginning he had shown no concern for anyone other than himself. The probability that we can make postmortem choices does, of course, imply that there will be sin beyond death – possibly spiritual sins such as pride, jealousy, resentment etc. – and this would be unacceptable to many.

The doctrine of a ‘second chance’, however, is rejected by all orthodox Protestant churches. It is argued, for example, by Augustinian/Calvinist theologians that God owes man nothing, because he has already given to us a fair probation (in Adam); that when any of us has the opportunity to hear the gospel, it is an extraordinary divine kindness; also that John 3:18 and similar passages teach that Jesus is the only way to salvation, but not that disbelief in him is the only ground for condemnation; we are condemned by all of our sin, including our corporate sin in Adam. (Rom. 3:23; 5:12-17; 6:23). The texts mentioned in support of future probation can also be interpreted in other ways.

It is also frequently maintained that the possibility of a ‘second chance’ cuts the nerve of mission, but this objection can be countered, simply by quoting our Lord’s commission – “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.” (Mk. 16:15). It is also suggested that if someone knew he was going to receive a ‘second chance’ of salvation beyond death, this would encourage an attitude of carelessness, and would undercut the sense of urgency associated with seeking salvation. But if such a person continues to reject salvation on the presumption that he can repent later,

he is forming, by that very attitude, a settled disposition to prefer his own will to God's. At the very least, this may make it much more difficult for him to come to accept God's will.² Also, an attitude of carelessness in this present life could be true only for 'the spectator', for one who stands outside the faith. No-one who has met God, in any real sense, could possibly become spiritually indifferent, because a compassionate God leaves the definitive act of final judgment to the parousia. For these reasons, it does not seem to be true that a 'second chance' casts doubt on the urgency of the choice we make in this life, or the significance of our earthly life as our time of probation. This life will predispose us in one way or another, and the longer we turn away from God, the more painful the process of our return will be. The principal argument, however, against a 'second chance' is the view that the final decision regarding our destiny must be made in this life, and this position will be extensively discussed later in this chapter. At this point, this thesis parts company from certain views, held by the opentheists, Pinnock and Sanders. They support the position of a postmortem 'first chance' for the unevangelised but they reject 'second chances' on the grounds that the decisions taken in this life determine the direction in which a human being is heading. It would not be possible, in their view, for a soul to change direction in the after-life, and therefore 'second chances' would not come into play. A similar belief appears in the theologies of Karl Rahner and Ladislaus Boros

² H.P. Owen believes that a careless refusal to respond to Christ here and now will predispose the sinner to continued rejection in the after-life – "An objection to the possibility of a fresh choice after death is that it would make this life spiritually pointless, or at least rob it of the spiritual importance that theists have usually ascribed to it. I do not think that this objection can be sustained. If there will be a new and final choice beyond death, it will be integrally related to the choices we have made on earth. In so far as we have freely chosen good, we shall be disposed to a final choice that will lead us to God; but in so far as we have chosen evil we shall be disposed to a final choice that will lead us away from him...And so a final choice beyond death would complete a pattern that is exhibited within this present world." – Owen, *op.cit.*, 137.

A similar point of view is expressed by Walls – "The question may be asked why anyone should endeavour now to love God and do good if there may be further opportunity at death or after death, to receive salvation. Would this not undercut the sense of urgency associated with seeking salvation? But if such persons continue to reject salvation on the presumption that they can repent later, it may well be that they are forming, by that very attitude, a settled disposition to prefer their wills to God's. At the very least, this may make it much more difficult for them to come to accept God's will." – Walls, J.L., *Hell, the Logic of Damnation*, *op.cit.*, 93-4.

Russell Aldwinckle is another scholar who rejects the objection in these terms: "It is argued that if men and women know that there may be a further chance of repentance and faith after death, then this will induce in them an attitude of carelessness in this present life. But this could be true only for 'the spectator', for one who stands outside the faith. Our argument is a deduction from the character of the holy love of God, not from general philosophical considerations. No-one who has met God in this sense could possibly become spiritually flippant because God in his compassion has decided to leave the definitive act of final judgment until the Parousia." – Aldwinckle, R., *Death in the Secular City*, (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1972), 136-7.

who identify the experience of death as the point where final destiny is determined, and closer attention will be paid to this below.

The argument in favour of future probation rests on reflection upon the nature of God's love. The love of God as revealed in the life and death of Christ, as well as in his teaching, emphasises its infinite and resourceful nature. God pursues the sinner like Francis Thomson's *Hound of Heaven*, searching for the lost soul, as the woman searches for the lost coin, or the shepherd for the lost sheep, or the Father waiting for the prodigal son --and he searches until he finds. There is an immeasurable depth and length to the divine love. To make death the point where this love abandons its pursuit of the soul would seem to be an arbitrary cut-off. The limitless, endless nature of God's love is fully revealed on Calvary, where God goes to the ultimate length of self-sacrifice to save mankind. This is also, as Chapter 3 showed, one of the main lessons contained in our Lord's descent to hell, where he travelled to the extreme depths of God-forsakenness to redeem mankind. If, then, it is true that humans survive death, and continue to exist in an intermediate state, the love of God must surely follow us there, never giving up the purpose of winning all souls to himself. It is encouraging, in this regard, to reflect upon those passages of Scripture, which tell us that God accompanies his creatures, even into hell – for example, Ps.139. Indeed, even in hell there is the possibility that the caring love of God will finally succeed in converting the soul, and translating it to heaven. In such a case, of course, the soul would be, not in the traditional hell of endless, retributive punishment, but rather, in a kind of purgatory, where the loving presence of God would exercise a purificatory, healing influence upon the sinner. Will, however, the infinitely resourceful love of God, which pursues the sinner even into the depths of hell itself, finally succeed in effecting the salvation of everyone? This leads on to consideration of conditional immortality.

(c) The Scriptural Case for Conditional Immortality

Conditionalists believe that the soul is not *inherently* immortal, but acquires immortality as a condition of justification by grace through faith. They believe that the unrighteous will cease to exist, because, apart from Christ, they will be mortal. This position is supported by texts from both Old and New Testaments. The Psalter is

a particularly fruitful ground for conditionalism, in verses such as – “The face of the Lord is against those who do evil, to cut off the memory of them from the earth”. (Ps.34:16); “Evil will slay the wicked; the foes of the righteous will be condemned.” (Ps.34:21). Ps.37 contains several verses in the same vein – “for like the grass they (evil men) will soon wither, like green plants they will soon die away.” (Ps.37:2); “For evil men will be cut off, but those who hope in the Lord will inherit the land. A little while, and the wicked will be no more; though you look for them, they will not be found.” (Ps.37:9-10); “But the wicked will perish...they will vanish – vanish like smoke.” (Ps.37:20); “But all sinners will be destroyed; the future of the wicked will be destroyed.” (Ps.37:38). In both testaments, the means of destruction is often fire, as in “Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire.” (Mal.4:1).

Conditional immortality is described throughout the New Testament. It is particularly evident in the teaching of Jesus, especially in Matthew, having been already predicted by John the Baptist. – “The axe is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.” (Matt. 3:10). He refers to the advent of Christ in these words – “His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing-floor, gathering his wheat into the barn, and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.” (Matt. 3:12). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus forecasts annihilation for many – “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it.” (Matt.7:13). It is significant that there is no mention here of the traditional view of eternal torment in hell for the wicked. A frequently quoted saying is – “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.” (Matt. 10:28). Opponents of conditionalism interpret this text as suggesting that soul and body are destroyed at death, then resurrected at the Last Judgment when they are condemned to eternal torment in hell, but this appears to be groundless and fanciful eisegesis. The text marks a contrast with the Greek philosophical concept of the eternal soul, with hell pictured instead as a realm of obliteration. In the Parable of the Weeds, our Lord likens the fate of the wicked to the burning of weed – “At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burnt.” (Matt. 13:30). “The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom

everything that causes sin, and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (Matt. 13:41-42). The identical fate for the wicked is also outlined in the Parable of the Net – “This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (Matt. 13:49-50). Additional teaching on final punishment, meaning loss of life, recurs in Jesus’s words to his disciples – “Whoever wants to save his life will lose it... What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?” (Matt. 16:25-26). Furthermore, the ‘stormy north side’ of the favourite text at John 3:16 clearly implies ‘perishing’ where the condition of faith is absent – “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him, shall not perish, but have eternal life.”

Study of the letters of St Paul, reveals frequent references to the destruction of the wicked, and also shows that many passages used by universalists to support their position, can equally well be interpreted as describing conditional immortality. Conditionalism, for example, is to be found in these passages – “He will punish those who do not know God, and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord”. (2 Thess. 1:8-9). In the Letter to the Romans, the connection between sin and death is emphasised as in “they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless... those who do such things deserve death.” (Rom. 1:31-32). Equally clear is the well-known verse – “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Rom. 6:23). The theme is repeated in several other epistles, for example, - “If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him.” (1 Cor. 3:17). Paul assures the Philippian Christians that those who oppose them will be punished – “This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved.” (Phil. 1:28). Later, in the same letter, Paul refers to those who “live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction.” (Phil. 3:18-19). In all of these passages, there is no mention of eternal torment as the fate of the wicked.

The same theme of destruction for the wicked is to be found in other New Testament writers. The author of 2 Peter warns of destruction for false teachers – “But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you.

They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them – bringing swift destruction on themselves.” (2 Pet. 2:1). “In their greed, these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.” (2 Pet. 2:3). The author also cites the condemnation of Sodom and Gomorrah which were burned to ashes, “and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly.” (2 Pet. 2:6). In the following chapter, it is said that the wicked will perish like the ancient world in the great Flood. (2 Pet. 3:6-7).

In the Letter to the Hebrews, it is recorded that “Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy.” (Heb. 10:28), and later, in the same chapter, “But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.” (Heb. 10:39). Once again, faith is mentioned as the condition of immortality. James also warns of death at the end of sin’s road, referring to salvation from the Second Death. – “Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way, will save him from death.” (Jas. 5:20). Again, as happens repeatedly, there is no mention of eternal torment. The writer of 1 John (as is the case with Paul), connects sin with death – “If anyone sees his brother commit a sin that does not lead to death, he should pray and God will give him life. I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death.” (1 John 5:16). Jude is another who uses Sodom and Gomorrah as an analogy to God’s judgment upon the wicked – “They serve as an example to those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.” (Jude 7). John, in Revelation, describes the suffering which will fall upon the unrepentant Jezebel, leading to the death of her children. (Rev. 2:20-23). In chapter 19, the smoke which rises from the fall of Babylon speaks of eternal destruction. (Rev. 19:3). At the end of the same chapter, the beast and the false prophet are thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, identified as the Second Death. (Rev. 19:20). The witness of the Bible throughout is, strongly in support of conditional immortality, with salvation as a gift of God’s grace, requiring a response of faith. Where such faith is lacking, and the sinner remains recalcitrant, he brings annihilation upon himself.

This position is at variance with that of those who uphold the traditional view that God consigns the impenitent sinner to the punishment of everlasting torment in hell. J.I. Packer is a notable upholder of this position. Part of the debate centres upon the

unequal time of probation which this life provides in different cases. Some live a long life and have ample opportunity before death to come to repentance and faith, while others are cut off in their prime, not to mention those who die in infancy. It would not seem to be in keeping with belief in a fair and loving God to hold that he would assign some of his creatures to eternal bliss and others to eternal separation from himself, on the basis of what would appear to be such an arbitrary moment of time. A further difficulty becomes evident on reflecting upon the view that death decides final destiny. This would mean that an individual Christian whose faith, by God's grace, would enable him to reach heaven became instantaneously perfect at death. If that were to be the case, he or she would not be in any morally significant sense the same person as the weak and sinful mortal who had died. A more accurate description might be that that imperfect mortal had ceased to exist, and that a perfect individual had been created in his or her place. Yet, if that were to happen in the twinkling of an eye, it would seem to make all the travail of our faith and moral effort here on earth, pointless. For God could have transformed us into perfect creatures in the first place²⁵. As this has not happened, it would seem that the sanctification of human beings requires a longer process of interaction with, and response to God, which would be sustained, not only through this life, but into further phases beyond the incidence of death.

This would be the view of John Hick, and it seems to deserve support, but it would not be acceptable, for example, to T.F. Torrance who draws attention to this astonishing fact:

...within the one indivisible epiphany or advent of the Son of God, the 'moment' when each of us dies, and goes to be with Christ is somehow identical with the 'moment' when he will come again to judge and renew his creation, for in a real ontological sense those who die in Christ are already risen with him.²⁶

Torrance comes to this view because of the difficulty of reconciling time as we experience it in this world, and as would seem to be necessary for continued development beyond death, with the changed conditions in an otherworldly sphere. If

Macmillan, 1961), 358.

²⁵ This point is made by John Hick in his *Evil and the God of Love*, (London: Collins, 1968), 383.

postmortem ‘development’ is to occur rather than instantaneous transformation, then some kind of temporal successiveness would seem to be necessary, rather than Torrance’s ‘relativity of simultaneity’. The apparent collapsing of individual judgment at death into final judgment at the final consummation also occurs because one cannot conceive of an individual’s entry into heaven at death without the collateral relationships of fellowship with others who are not yet dead. Final decision on a soul’s destiny at death would appear to isolate that individual in denial of the corporate nature of final salvation. It is because one cannot separate individual and corporate eschatology, that individuals do not enter into their final destiny at death, but must wait for the general resurrection, and the Last Judgment at the end of history.

The view which is promoted in this thesis is strongly supported, for example, by William Temple in a sermon preached in Westminster Abbey on All Saints’ Day, 1919, defending the practice of praying for the dead. He maintains that one of the objections to it is unfounded – “the assumption that at death, all is irrevocably settled.” This was a delusion which, he claims, was once prevalent, but had no evidence to support it, either in revelation or in reason.²⁷

The traditional Augustinian view maintains that persons determine their own eternal destiny through a conscious decision ‘for’ or ‘against’ Christ prior to their death. Thus, physical death seals the fate of those who are spiritually dead. This position has dire consequences for those who have never heard of God’s salvation, provided freely by Christ. They are bound for hell. The postmortem destination of all human agents is fixed by divine decree, so that the person’s state vis-à-vis salvation at the point of death is such that it characterises their postmortem existence. Postmortem conversion is then impossible, nor can the elect ever fall into sin, after their acceptance into heaven. It also denies any notion that the reprobate might be punished for a period after death, so that they might be purified of their sin and then enter heaven. In this final separation, taking place at death, traditional Augustinian theology conceives God

²⁶ Torrance, T.F., “Immortality and Light”, in Colwell, J. (ed.), *Called to One Hope*, (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2000), 141.

²⁷ Quoted by Welsby, P.A., in *Theology*, 69 (1966), 250. Yet, “the delusion” does not lack support, notably by O.C.Quick who believes that “At death the destiny of the individual soul to salvation or perdition is fixed for ever.” – Quick, O.C., *Doctrines of the Creed*, (Welwyn: Nisbet, 1938), 241.

as displaying his mercy and grace in the elect, and his wrath and justice in the reprobate.

One of the ideas associated with this view is that, although the introduction of a soul into the spiritual world may of itself have a converting effect where there is already a germ of faith, there is no new sin in the intermediate state, only what the soul carries with it, and no fresh temptation to sin. That view certainly entails the finality of decision on destiny at, or before, death. The scriptural witness, however, locates judgment upon sin and unbelief at the Last Judgment, rather than at death. Several texts indicate this – for example, Acts 17:31; 2 Tim. 1:12; 4:8; 1 John 5:25-29; Matt 8:11 and Rev. 21:25. These texts can be interpreted as indicating that God still invites sinners from all areas of the globe, and all periods of history, to repentance in the after-life. Indeed, if this were not so, the Last Judgment, which figures so prominently in the Bible, would appear to be superfluous, as the critical separation would have already taken place at death. The Last Judgment would simply mark a confirmation of judgment at death. Even if the Last Judgment is to be understood as a process rather than as a climactic event, the process would require to continue beyond death, if justice is to be done to those biblical texts.

Texts supporting this view, have been mentioned and it is worth enquiring whether the opposite point of view also has scripture to support it. The text which comes nearest to that position is Heb. 9:27 – “Just as man is destined to die once, and after that, to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.” Yet, this text cannot prove that final destiny is decided at death. It does not foreclose the possibility of an interim period between death and final judgment – indeed, the reference to ‘those who are waiting for him’ would seem to imply an intermediate state where changes in destiny could occur.

Attention must now be given to the distinctive position of two modern Roman Catholic theologians – Karl Rahner and Ladislaus Boros. Their view has similarities to the opentheism of Pinnock and Sanders in this respect – that final destiny, or, at least, the direction in which souls are heading, is fixed at, or around, death. Rahner believes that “the single and total perfecting of man in ‘body’ and ‘soul’ takes place

immediately after death.”²⁸ He rejects an understanding of ‘eternity’ which conceives it to take place ‘after’ the time experienced before death, as if it prolonged time. His view is that through death, “there is...the achieved definitiveness of the freely matured existence of man.”²⁹

This understanding of death is seen as the fulfilment of all that the individual has achieved during his earthly life. It can be regarded as the final act of human freedom for which his whole personal history has been the preparation, and it cannot be undone after death. Rahner conceives the soul as entering into deeper relation to the world which he describes as a ‘pan-cosmic’ relation. When we see death in relation to the death and resurrection of Christ, for the Christian believer it is the final act of self-surrender to the God in whom one has trusted, and to whom one looks for forgiveness and acceptance. This is the way in which the believer enters most fully into the mystery of dying and rising with Christ, as Paul affirms in Rom. 6:4-5. This fixity of destiny at death is in line with official Roman Catholic teaching that death marks the end of the possibility for conversion, and for merit or demerit – the souls of the departed proceeding to heaven, hell or purgatory after death. Rahner believes that death is the point at which every human being is ultimately and expressly confronted by the gospel, by the crucified and risen Lord. This would apply both to believers and unbelievers. Unbelievers, coming from, for example, other religions, would have an explicit offer of redemption. It is, therefore, possible, on this view, to be hopeful about the salvation of non-Christians. It is interesting to note that we have, here, a similar conflation between the particular judgments of individuals on their deaths and the general judgment, as was seen above in the thought of Torrance. The resurrection of the flesh and the general judgment take place ‘parallel’ to the temporal history of the world. Here, Rahner, like Torrance, is grappling with the problem of time ‘after’ death. He views eternity, not as a never-ending continuation of time, but as the definite and permanent outcome of time.

Moltmann, however, raises objections to the identification of personal death with the eschatological resurrection of the dead, because, even if this life’s categories of time

²⁸ Rahner, K., *Theological Investigations*, XVII, (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1981), 115.

²⁹ Rahner, *ibid.*, IV, (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1966), 348.

and space no longer apply to human beings after death, “personal perfecting and the perfecting of the world do not have to coincide.”³⁰

In the light of these view on death, one might wonder how Rahner perceives purgatory. He understands the transformation of the person, under the grace of conversion, as involving temporal punishments due to sin, which cannot fail to be a painful process of development. Purgatory, or the payment of these temporal punishments is in his words –

a maturing process of the person through which, though gradually, all the powers of the human being become slowly integrated into the basic decision of the free person.³¹

But if death is the last and definitive act of human freedom, and the dead are released from the flux of time, how can they undergo a process of purification and integration ‘after’ death? Rahner’s answer is that the purification in purgatory is an aspect of death itself. So, the ‘duration’ of the person’s purification is understood, not in temporal terms, but as the depth and intensity of the purifying pains the person experiences in death itself.³²

One would have to say that there is an ambiguity in Rahner’s thought here. On the one hand, he says that there is a finality achieved by man in death, but, on the other hand, there is a perfection of his fulfilment which is still to come “in the transfiguration of his bodily existence.” He maintains that there is no continuity ‘in time’ after death. Yet, he believes in maturation beyond death. Maturation suggests postmortem spiritual development, and that, in turn, is difficult to imagine without temporal successiveness. It may be that he agrees with Moltmann, that, after death, there is a different kind of ‘time’, than we experience here on earth.³³

A key question related to one of the main emphases in this thesis is – Does Rahner believe in an intermediate state? Rahner believes that the doctrine of the intermediate

³⁰ Moltmann, J., *The Coming of God*, op.cit., 103.

³¹ Rahner, op.cit., XIX, (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1983), 187.

³² Rahner, *ibid.*, 186.

state arose because of the problem of the delayed *parousia*. An intermediate, temporal and bodiless state was inserted in between the death of the individual and the general resurrection at the end of the world.³⁴ Rahner appears to accept the possibility of an intermediate state, as he says that we cannot deny an interval between death and the person's corporate fulfilment, during which there is personal maturation in "a state of purification." Rahner's view of the finality of the decision, in, or about death, creates problems for him in relation to the traditional concept of purgatory, and his use of the term 'process'. Peter Phan recognises these difficulties when he observes that Rahner believes that the dead continue to participate in "the fundamental temporality and historicity of the world." This presupposes the traditional representation of purgatory, and seems to imply an intermediate state.³⁵

The theology of Ladislaus Boros agrees with Rahner's position. He also believes that death brings the individual to a final state in which no further change is possible in its basic tendency. Once beyond death, no more decisions can be made.³⁶ This finality applies to the blessed, to the reprobate and to those who are destined for the place of perfection. This means, as with Rahner, that the traditional concept of purgatory is

³³ Rahner notes that "in Catholic theology the question is not yet settled with regard to the sense in which, and the degree to which, temporal categories can still be applied here." – Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1978), 442.

³⁴ Rahner says – "Such a difference of phasing... is in fact also to be seen in the contrast between the fulfilment of the individual in death and the universal consummation of the world, between the finality achieved by man in death, and the clarification and perfection of this fulfilment which is still to come in the transformation of his bodily existence. Since it cannot be denied that there is an 'intermediate state' in the destiny of man between death and bodily fulfilment, unless one holds that what is saved is not what was to be saved, there can be no decisive objection to the notion that man reaches personal maturity in the 'intermediate state.' – Rahner, *op.cit.*, IV, (London: Darton, Lonman & Todd, 1966), 353.

³⁵ Phan says that Rahner believes that since the dead are not cut off from the world, it is conceivable that they must continue, in their own way, to participate in the fundamental temporality and historicity of the world, even if they have already reached their consummation in the beatific vision of God. This preserves the traditional representation of purgatory, but Rahner is not sympathetic to it since it ultimately presupposes that there is a kind of intermediate state. – Phan, P.C., *Eternity in Time*, (London: Associated University Presses, 1988), 127. Elsewhere Rahner says – "It is by no means certain that the doctrine about the Intermediate State is *anything more* than an intellectual framework, or way of thinking. So, whatever it has to tell us (apart from statements about the commencement through death of the final form of man's history of freedom, and about the inclusion of the body in this final form), does not necessarily have to be part of Christian eschatology itself." – Rahner, "The Intermediate State" in *Theological Investigations XVII*, (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1981), 117.

Phan points out further ambiguity in Rahner's thought when Rahner concedes that – "perhaps the unintegrated elements in man are incorporated into the final personal decision, now become definite in death, in a lengthy 'process' which (while still maintaining what I said earlier about the release of the deceased from our time) might nevertheless be seen as analogous to the present time in a way that by and large corresponds to the traditional idea of purgatory." – *Theological Investigations*, XIX, 185.

decisively modified. It is the point of intersection between life and death. It is no longer conceived as a process of purification that can be measured, similar to the passage of time in our earthly life. It is, rather, in Boros's view, the passage which we effect in our final decision, through the purifying fire of divine love. The encounter with Christ would be our purgatory. In typical Roman Catholic thought, he believes that every sin a person commits entails a debt of punishment. In the process of purification, this debt is paid through the pains of satisfaction. But remission of sin can only take place during the person's earthly pilgrimage before death. The final decision still requires to be taken where forgiveness can be obtained. The state of purification is associated with the last, final meeting with Christ, and this occurs *in*, and not before or after death. Death, therefore, in his eyes, is not only a sign of bringing punishment, but also a sign of God's mercy and kindness. The hypothesis of death as a final decision does not mean a devaluation of the decisions made during earthly life. It is in part determined by the preparatory decisions taken during the course of a life-time, and grows out of them.

This view of Rahner and Boros is an improvement on the Augustinian/Calvinist position which maintains that the decision 'for' or 'against' Christ taken in this life is final and irrevocable. In such a case, death, as it were, freezes people either in grace or sin forever. This is especially the case when one considers that such earthly decisions are limited by knowledge, passion and restricted possibilities. According to Boros, at the moment of death, one can make the first totally personal choice about one's final, eternal destiny.

There are, however, serious objections to the views propounded by Rahner and Boros. For example, there is no basis in experience for the idea that people make, or are in any condition, to make, a choice at the moment of death. In practice, Boros attributes the final option to the disembodied spirit, in which case it is no longer the final option of life, but the initial option after death. It is also difficult to see what kind of choice one could have as the final option. What sense does it make for Boros to speak of self-surrender to God in face of the immediate, inevitability of death? If one is perfectly

³⁶ Boros, L., *The Moment of Truth*, (London: Burns & Oates, 1962), 86.

aware at the moment of death, one will realise that the inevitable is now present. Will this amount to a real choice?

Where an unbeliever experiences the moment of death, it is hardly credible that such an instantaneous encounter with Christ could enable an unevangelised person (albeit heading in the right direction for salvation), to understand and learn about confession and reconciliation to God through faith in Christ – and retain any continuity or identity with his earthly personality. Spiritual development towards perfection, and the beatific vision would appear to require a much longer period through some kind of postmortem time. The view which we have found in both Rahner and Boros, that death renders a person's decision 'for' or 'against' God, reached during the time of his or her earthly life and finalised in the moment of death, unalterable, runs counter to the main thrust of this thesis which would prefer to hold open the possibility of postmortem evangelisation and conversion. Otherwise, if the fateful decision regarding final destiny has to be taken in this life, the only way in which the unevangelised who have not had an opportunity to encounter Christ in this life, can be saved, is through inclusivism a position rejected above.

(e) Scriptural Evidence and Theology For and Against Universalism

The New Testament contains two main series of passages and texts relevant to universalism. One series is interpreted in a universalist sense by some theologians, but not by others. The second series of texts suggests that some humans attain salvation, but others are condemned. The following texts seem to point to the salvation of the complete human race, although some of them could be interpreted in an Arminian sense, according to which God *desires* to save everyone, but may not actually achieve his desire:

Christ said if he were lifted up from the earth, he would draw all men unto him (John 12:32). Just as all men die in Adam, they live in Christ (1 Cor. 15:22). God has reconciled the world to himself. (2 Cor. 5:19). God will sum up the entire universe in Christ. (Eph. 1:10). God desires all men to be saved. (1 Tim. 2:4). The grace of God brings salvation to all men. (Titus 2:11). God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. (2 Pet. 3:9). Christ's death is the propitiation of the sins of all the world. (1 John 2:2).

Death and hell are destroyed in the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14). God is going to restore all things to their primal unity. (Acts 3:21). Just as Adam brought all men into condemnation, Christ brings all men into salvation. (Rom. 5:18). Christ has tasted death for every man. (Heb. 2:9). Christ shall reign until he is Lord of all. (1 Cor. 15:25; Phil. 2:9-11).

Among the second series pointing to a dual outcome (salvation for some and condemnation for others), are a number of texts in the Synoptic Gospels which express warnings by Jesus. They are – about the consequences of rejecting the gospel. There are dangers of losing one's soul. (Mk. 8:36), and of being denied by the Son of Man. (Mk. 8:38; Matt. 10:33). He also spoke about the one sin which could never be forgiven, the sin against the Holy Spirit, which is to be understood as the sin of refusing to see and acknowledge the work of God in Jesus himself. (Mk. 3:28f.). Jesus also warns that sinners and those who lead others into sin will suffer an unimaginable fate and be cast into Gehenna, a place of unquenchable, everlasting fire. (Mk. 9:43-47), etc. These teachings, which are quite clear, are confirmed by the teaching of various parables and parabolic sayings, among which the well-known Parable of the Sheep and the Goats is prominent. (Matt. 25:31-46). We can see, therefore, that there are frequent references in the Gospels to a 'double outcome', and this has been the position held by most of the theologians of the Christian Church – Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Reformed, Lutheran and Anglican. There is to be a final separation of the saved and the lost, of sheep and goats. (Matt. 25:46; cf. Matt. 7:21-23). It is also significant that most of the 'hard sayings' in the Gospels, the passages which most clearly and unmistakably warn of eternal punishment, are found on the lips of Jesus himself.

As was noted in connection with the scriptural basis for conditional immortality, there is scholarly division of opinion on how to interpret *aionios* ('everlasting') in the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats.³⁷ The same division of scholarly opinion is to be found in the interpretation of Pauline passages. These include the passages which

³⁷ The prominent modern exponent of universalism, Thomas Talbott, maintains that in the New Testament, *aionios* ('everlasting'), never refers to a 'temporal process of unending duration.' He believes that the key question is how we are to understand divine punishment and its essential purpose, and his conclusion is that, by his use of *kolasis*, ('punishment'), the Gospel writer had in mind 'an eternal correction of some kind'; the punishment in Matt. 25:46 is remedial and not unending. – Talbott, T., "A Pauline Interpretation of Divine Judgment" in Parry R, and Partridge C., (eds.), *Universal Salvation*, op.cit., 46-47. Scholars who take the opposite view say that if the punishment is everlasting, neither is the life given to the righteous.

speak of the restoration of all things (Eph. 1:10 and Col 1:20); the ending of the hymn in Phil. 2 with its vision of the glorified universe in its peace and concord (Phil. 2:10f.) and particularly 1 Cor. 15:28 where Paul after asserting that Christ's enemies will be put under his feet, pictures him handing over the rule to God, now consummated as his kingdom, that God may be 'all in all.'³⁸

Universalists like Thomas Talbott claim that the victory which Christ won over sin and death through his resurrection, involves the redemption of sinful men and women, and that every Christian represents the defeat of an enemy, and the destruction of our sinful nature. Our reconciliation to God means that Christ has "defeated and placed under his feet the enemy that we once were."³⁹ Christ's overcoming of the last enemy, death, means that all separation from God is overcome, when all persons will be in subjection to Christ. Then the Father will be 'all in all' because all persons belong to him. This emphasis upon the destruction of sin reveals one of the ways in which universalists depart from the traditional view which holds that God does not destroy sin completely, but keeps it alive through an eternity of hell. Over against this view, the Pauline hymn in Phil. 2 and Col. 1:20 seem to show that Paul's concept of reconciliation, which is a redemptive concept, applies not only to human beings but to all of the spiritual principalities and dominions as well.

Another Pauline doctrine to which universalists refer is the doctrine of the two Adams. This doctrine occurs in Rom. 5 and 1 Cor. 15. The first Adam symbolises humanity in the context of sin and death; the second Adam, Jesus Christ, represents the victory of divine power over sin and death, and all separation from God. The key text is Rom. 5:18 – "Consequently, just as the result of the trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men." Confirmation of the universalist thrust of this text can be found in the earlier verse at 5:12 – where Paul identifies the group or class he has in mind as *all* human beings – "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through

³⁸ Jurgen Moltmann, in buttressing his support for universalism notes significantly – "The great chapter on the Resurrection (1 Cor. 15) makes no mention at all of a judgment with a double outcome. Paul builds up his Adam-Christ typology on the same pattern (Rom. 5:18), and, consequently, 1 Cor. 15:22. This universalism embraces Jews and Gentiles without abolishing the difference between them, or reducing it to uniformity."- Moltmann, J., *The Coming of God*, op.cit., 240-1.

³⁹ Talbott, T., "Christ Victorious", in Parry, R., and Partridge C., (eds.), "Universal Salvation", op.cit., 27-28.

sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned...” A different conclusion can, however, be drawn from these verses, namely that Paul is not necessarily asserting that all will be saved, but that the work of Christ is for all, and that he alone is the Saviour in virtue of the one saving event of his death. There are alternative ways of understanding Rom. 5:18-19 which reject universalism. There is, for example, the Augustinian view that Paul did not literally have in mind *all human beings*, but only ‘all of the elect’; there is also the Arminian view that, although Paul literally meant ‘all human beings’, this carries no implication of actual salvation.

Where the interpretation of Scripture leads to such a division of scholarly opinion, full weight must surely be given to the views of New Testament specialists, most of whom would appear to reject universalism. Howard Marshall’s conclusion is representative of this opinion, when he writes that the New Testament teaches that there will be a final judgment on the impenitent, which will mean that some will be lost. He concludes therefore, that “the New Testament does not teach or imply universal salvation.”⁴⁰

The main thrust of universalism would seem to arise out of theological views implied by a general understanding of New Testament teaching as a whole, rather than from exegesis of particular texts alone. It tends to focus on the love of God which is all-embracing, including the whole human race in its compass. It is inconceivable to universalists that such divine love would not desire to redeem creation.

It is instructive to explore, in some detail, the thought of Origen of Alexandria, whose doctrine of *apokatastasis panton* - ‘the restoration of all things’ is the first real universalism. He teaches that the life of the soul did not begin when the soul joined to the body,⁴¹ but that the soul had pre-existed, and had fallen in that earlier state.⁴² His deduction from this is that the soul’s ultimate destiny is assured, for ‘the end is always like the beginning’⁴³. Humanity will be restored to its original state – to unity with the Logos. Origen’s ideas have influenced universalist thinking ever since. It should be

⁴⁰ Marshall, H., “The New Testament Does Not Teach Universal Salvation” in Parry, R., and Partridge C. (eds.), *Universal Salvation*, op.cit., 74.

⁴¹ Origen, *Against Celsus*, 3.81.

⁴² The pre-existence of the soul derives from the philosophy of Plato, and was rejected by the Fifth Ecumenical Council. It was also later rejected by Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus the Confessor.

noticed, for instance, that he regards 1 Cor. 15:24-28 as a decisive passage, as does Moltmann many centuries later. In Origen's view, this text pictures 'the end' because it prophesies the subjection of all enemies, including death, to Christ, and the delivery of the kingdom by Christ to the Father. Then God would be all in all.⁴⁴

Such a view has immediate repercussions, relevant to the ultimate destiny of the unevangelised. If all human beings are to be incorporated into the eschatological church, and know God as the Son knows him, some kind of postmortem conversion will be required. One would, therefore, wish to enquire how Origen views this happening. It involves Origen in believing that the power of the saving will of God extends beyond the limits of this earthly life, granting people a further opportunity for purification and eventual salvation after death. It could be that there is to be found here the origins of belief in purgatory. It is interesting to note that Augustine, while opposing Origen's universalism, nevertheless believes that there are 'temporary punishments after death'⁴⁵, and that it is appropriate to pray that some of the dead be granted remission of sins.

In this postmortem existence, Origen believes that the soul retains the form (or *eidos*) of the body, in the sense of being the bearer of the body's essential characteristics. From the *eidos* the spiritual body is built up. Unlike the more traditional view that souls after death are disembodied, Origen believes that souls are corporal in some sense, because only God is completely incorporeal.⁴⁶

The process of purification, which Origen envisages, is conceived in intellectual terms, and is described by him as being 'a school for souls'.⁴⁷ Origen follows Clement of Alexandria in regarding the punishment as medicinal, and therefore, temporary, which means that he expects the wicked to repent.⁴⁸ This view of postmortem punishment as

⁴³ Origen, *On First Principles*, 1.6.2.

⁴⁴ The corporate nature of this submission to God is noted by Robert Doyle who comments thus – "The whole eschatological church will know God as the Son knows him... This knowledge is a mingling and union with God in love. God will ultimately be the totally satisfying object of every mind's activity... all human souls will ultimately be saved, and will be united to God forever in loving contemplation." – Doyle, Robert C., *Eschatology and the Shape of Christian Belief*, op.cit., 66.

⁴⁵ Augustine, *City of God*, 21.13.

⁴⁶ Origen, *On First Principles*, 2.2.1.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, 2.11.6.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, 3.6.5.

therapeutic is also held many centuries later by Schleiermacher, the first influential theologian since the Early Fathers to support universalism. He rejects the traditional notion of the eternal punishment of sinners as inconsistent with the 'eternal fatherly love of God'. He asserts that if the punishment were physical, it simply could not go on for ever, and, if it consisted of the pains of conscience, it would be difficult to imagine how the awakened conscience, as a living movement of the spirit, could fail to issue in some good. His assumption is that good punishment is reformatory, bringing with it 'a sharpened feeling for the difference between good and evil.'⁴⁹

It is worth observing that Origen is not alone in the Patristic period in espousing universalism. Gregory of Nyssa follows in his footsteps. Like Origen, Gregory grounds his belief in universal salvation on 1 Cor. 15:28 and Phil. 2:10. It is noteworthy that both Origen and Gregory are circumspect when they mention universal salvation, yet the main thrust of both theologies is towards the conclusion that all will be saved.⁵⁰ A particularly interesting aspect of Gregory's thought is his doctrine of perpetual progress in the future state. We progress, not so much in the sense of advancing *towards* God, but rather in the sense of participating more fully *in* God.

As with Origen, one finds echoes of Gregory's views in the thinking of modern universalists. In particular, Hick's belief in postmortem development is reminiscent of Gregory's position on perpetual progress. Gregory believes that, in its perfect, purified

⁴⁹ Schleiermacher, F.D.E., *The Christian Faith*, trans. of 2nd German edition (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1989).

⁵⁰ This circumspection is mentioned by Morwenna Ludlow when she notes that Gregory "sometimes attributes the idea to a character other than himself in a dialogue, or prefacing his remarks with the comment that 'some people claim'" – Ludlow, Morwenna, "Universalism in the History of Christianity" in Parry, R., and Partridge, C., (eds.), op.cit., 193. Sometimes more than 'circumspection' has been noticed in the view of Origen. Indeed, it could be described as 'ambiguity'. Frederick Norris draws attention to the fact that in *On First Principles* 1.7.5, it is difficult to tell whether the claim that God will be 'all in all' includes every creature, or only the kingdom which Christ delivers to the Father, a kingdom comprising those who follow Christ" – Norris, Frederick W., "Universal Salvation in Origen and Maximus" in Cameron, Nigel M. de S., (ed.), *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell*, op.cit., 52. Norris believes that Origen's vacillation is due to the ambiguity of Scripture – "In the documents which we have, he (Origen), says that the reader must choose between whether the lost are eternally damned, or whether, at some time, they will be released from their suffering and punishment. As Scripture reads, he finds no answer to these alternatives." (ibid. 58). Norris, in fact, represents Origen as teaching two views – universal salvation and limited hell, as well as salvation only for those who live the Gospel and eternal damnation, perhaps even annihilation, for those who, like the devil, continuously refuse. The balance of scholarly opinion, however, is heavily weighted in favour of Origen's universalism.

state, the soul is naturally attracted towards God. While this may refer to the blissfulness of heaven rather than to the imperfect condition of the soul in an intermediate state, it seems uncommonly similar to Hick's belief that God created us with a bias towards him, which can be clouded over, but never obscured, by sin. Hick, believing in a kind of purgatory, feels that some will require long periods of reform after death before turning to God.⁵¹ This view of Hick's is possibly true, but does not necessarily lead to his conclusion that all will eventually turn to God.

Most universalists today would follow Origen in regarding God's justice as restorative, and his punishment as corrective. This is so, because they do not believe that to condemn sinners to eternal, conscious torment in line with the traditional doctrine of hell is consistent with a just and loving God. The sending of people to a temporary hell can be reconciled with divine love. It is, however, difficult to see how the 'torture chamber' of an eternal hell can be a *just* punishment for the finite sins of any mortal. The vitally important aspect of any view of hell for universalists is that people should be able to be delivered from hell before it is too late. This view of hell as temporary, rather than eternal, arises from the conviction that a just and loving God would not leave anyone in hell permanently.

The universalist view, however, that divine punishment is reformatory in a temporary hell is rejected by theologians coming from the neo-Calvinist and conservative-evangelical wings of the Church. They seek to retain the retributive view of punishment, arguing that hell is the place where God's undiluted anger is poured out against sinners, who have rebelled against him, and that all sin must be punished infinitely.⁵² Whereas universalists regard God's justice as an aspect of his love, traditionalists do not think that the New Testament anywhere makes God's love and

⁵¹ Hick, J., *Death and Eternal Life*, (London: Collins, 1976), 242-261.

⁵² Daniel Strange, for example, argues from God's angry revulsion to sin, and concludes that the – "primary purpose of divine punishment, and therefore the purpose of hell is not remedial or restorative, as Talbott thinks, but retributive... (Hell is) the place where God's undiluted anger is poured out against sinners who have rebelled against him. What must be noted here is that while God is just in the degrees of punishment inflicted in hell, all sin must be punished infinitely." – Strange, D., "A Calvinist Response to Talbott's Universalism" in Parry, R., & Partridge, C., (eds.), *Universal Salvation*, op.cit., 150-1.

justice identical, and hold that the wrath of God signifies God's retributive judgment upon those who have transgressed his law.⁵³

Such views are unacceptable because they seriously restrict the depth and endurance of God's love. While God feels revulsion against sin, he would never allow his wrath to stifle his love, abandoning the sinner to eternal punishment. The belief that sin must be punished infinitely, seems to be out of proportion to the degree of wickedness perpetrated by mortal human beings. One of the main assertions of this thesis is that there exists a postmortem intermediate state, affording further opportunity for repentance leading to salvation.

Opentheists tend to reject universalism because, with the irrationality of sin, there is no guarantee that God will overcome our irrationality with his love. Furthermore, when universalists *claim* that God can bring about the reconciliation of all free creatures, they never plausibly demonstrate *how* this can be, if the creatures remain forever free. The opentheist position is that the God of the Bible is a vulnerable God whose will is not always fulfilled, and that includes his desire to redeem all his creatures.⁵⁴ As far as postmortem conversion is concerned, the universalist view that God, in his persistent love, will eventually wear down the resistance of sinners is rejected by opentheists on two grounds – (1) There are too many biblical texts warning of possible rejection. (2) Universalism does not allow humans to say 'no' to God. The response of love cannot be forced, and to believe otherwise, suggests a divine determinism, unacceptable to opentheists of an Arminian persuasion. Opentheists, then, seem generally to agree that universalism must be rejected, in order to preserve genuine human freedom; at most, universal salvation can be only a possibility – a position which is held by many other theologians who are not opentheists.

The conclusion of this discussion must be that although one may hope that all will be saved, there can be no certainty that this will be so.⁵⁵ It is important to note that if the

⁵³ Packer, for example, believes that the wrath of God signifies – “his retributive judgment upon those who have transgressed his law. This means that unbelievers are subjected to death: being under the law and under sin, they are inescapably under wrath and under death. (Rom. 3:23).” – Packer, J., *Celebrating the Saving Work of God*, op.cit., 173.

⁵⁴ See Sanders, J., *No Other Name*, op.cit., 112-3.

⁵⁵ This is the view of many eminent theologians, including, for example, Donald Baillie, who, after a careful weighing of biblical texts 'for' and 'against' universalism, concludes – “We can only rest in the

doctrine of dogmatic universal salvation, is rejected, this should not imply that some people will definitely be rejected by God. Once again, it is simply a question of hoping and praying that all will be saved. There is always the possibility that God, in his free love, will save everyone, but this can never be promulgated as a dogmatic proposition.⁵⁶

Universal hope requires an intermediate state for God to effect the salvation of everyone. God's infinite love is immeasurably patient. This is the sustained teaching of the New Testament in our Lord's Parables of the Lost Coin, the Lost Sheep and the Prodigal Son. Jesus came to 'seek and to save the lost'. As the writer of the Letter to the Ephesians prays – "And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long, and high and deep, is the love of Christ." (Eph. 3:18). The Cross itself indicates the lengths to which the love of God goes in pursuing the purpose of redemption. As there is no compulsion about his love, he waits until each of his creatures responds to his love. As Paul observes, -. "Love never fails". (1 Cor. 13:18). It is never exhausted, nor does it come to an end.

Those who do not accept *hopeful universalism* might argue that it would contradict Jesus's judgment discourses. Yet, these give no indication as to whether people are actually lost, because they are not factual descriptions, but summonses to personal decision for God.⁵⁷

hope of the Gospel. Eternal death is the ultimate tragic possibility. But it may be that no person will ever inherit and realise it; because God's omnipotence *may* win all people in the end." – Baillie, D.M., "The Kingdom of God and the Christian Hope" op.cit. Baillie also believes that it is difficult to adopt restoration as a dogmatic position, because it reduces the significance of choice.

A similar view is held by Paul Tillich who finds it impossible to remove uncertainty about our ultimate destiny, yet concludes that "above this incertitude there are moments in which we are paradoxically certain of the return to the eternal from which we came...both have to be denied – the threat of eternal death, and the security of the return." – Tillich, P., *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3, (London: Nisbit, 1964), 444.

⁵⁶ In Torrance's words – "At the very best, universalism could only be concerned with a hope, with a possibility. But to turn it into a dogmatic statement is to destroy the possibility in the necessity." – Torrance, T.F. "Universalism or Election", op.cit., 313.

⁵⁷ As Peter Phan observes – "They can be lost forever if they reject God's offer of salvation. It is not possible to deduce from Jesus's judgment discourses a clear indication as to whether people are actually lost, and how many may be, since these discourses are not factual descriptions, but a summons to personal decision for God." -. Phan, P.C., *Eternity in Time*, op.cit., 140-50.

It is interesting to note Von Balthasar's opinion (another 'hopeful universalist') that we have a duty to hope for the salvation of all; otherwise, we are not loving unreservedly, and are usually tempted to leave others to their fate.⁵⁸

A further point which can be advanced in support of 'hopeful' rather than 'dogmatic universalism' arises out of God's freedom. The freedom of God means that reprobation is always a possibility⁵⁹. It also means that when a human being dies, God has unlimited possibilities in relation to that individual's destiny. Dogmatic universalism, while offering supposed comfort to the individual, must be rejected because the gospel does not provide assurance about destiny, but rather guides one on how to live in faith, while uncertain about one's future.⁶⁰ It is also a strong point of 'hopeful universalism' that we must obey God, because he is the Lord, and not in order to receive some reward. Where people have no dogmatic assurance about their destiny, they have to rely solely on the grace of God.

Other reasons why we may benefit from uncertainty about our future destiny, are expressed in the sermons of Hugh Blair, a Scottish Enlightenment preacher. In a sermon entitled *On Our Imperfect Knowledge of a Future State*,⁶¹ taking as his text, "For now we see through a glass darkly," (1 Cor.13:12), Blair maintains that if we had knowledge of our future state, it could have disastrous consequences. We would lose interest in promoting the good order and happiness of society in this life, because all our desires and attention would be focused on the glorious regions beyond death. As we face up to the difficulties and temptations of this life, the discipline which develops virtues, such as courage and self-denial, serves as a preparation for the life to come. Blair compares our earthly life of disciplined preparation for eternity, to the education

⁵⁸ Von Balthasar's 'hopeful universalism' receives strong support from the Jesuit theologian, John R. Sachs who observes – "...his (Von Balthasar's) is a pointed, but not extreme position, quite consonant with Church teaching, and the thought of most other major Catholic theologians". – Sachs, J.R., S.J., "Current Eschatology: Universal Salvation and the Problem of Hell." in *Theological Studies*, 52 (1991), 232.

⁵⁹ This freedom of God is a pronounced emphasis in the theology of Karl Barth, as is clear from this quotation – "The love that God has in Himself as the triune God has also turned and manifested itself in freedom outwards. It did not have to do this. It would not have been any less love if it had not done so. But it has done so." – Barth, K., *Church Dogmatics* II/1, Bromiley G.W., and Torrance, T.F., (eds.), (London and New York: T. & T. Clark International, 1957), 476.

⁶⁰ Barth, K., *Church Dogmatics*, II/2, *ibid.*, 147.

⁶¹ Blair, H., *Sermons*, vol.1 (Edinburgh 1824), 40-53, referred to in Broadie, A., *The Scottish Enlightenment*, (Edinburgh: Birlinn Ltd., 2001), 147-8.

of children which fits them for adulthood. It is, he believes, the sign of a wise providence, that we are not given a clear vision of our future state.

The conclusion of this chapter, then, is a belief in 'hopeful universalism', likewise rejecting on scriptural grounds, and also, in order to make due allowance for human freedom, any dogmatic assertion of universalism. As the Arminian thrust of open theism maintains, there is a need for faith, in acceptance of the offer of salvation, under the promised guidance of the Holy Spirit. In the case of the millions who are unevangelised at the time of their deaths, this will require postmortem encounters with Christ, when faith will become a real possibility. This faith will still require acceptance in response to the grace of God in Christ. Acceptance of a full-blown universalism would have meant a positive outcome for the final destiny of the unevangelised, and further debate would have been superfluous. As universal salvation is, uncertain, conditional immortality should be accepted as a possibility in the event of hope for universal salvation, not being realised. The thesis contends for a considerable departure from traditional eschatology which would have repercussions in the life of the Church. The practical consequences following upon its conclusions will now be outlined.

CHAPTER 7

PRACTICAL CONSEQUENCES FOR THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

This final chapter of the thesis explores practical consequences affecting the life of the Church. As Robert Doyle observes:

A little reflection on ecclesiology shows that our understanding of 'heaven' and how it relates to 'church', strongly influences our practical church activities.¹

(a) Pastoral Care

One of the obvious aspects of decline in church attendance in Western Europe today is that there are far fewer men than women at worship on a regular basis. In innumerable households the wife retains a live faith and active membership of the Church, but the husband is either agnostic or an atheist, and his church membership is either non-existent or merely nominal. It is also a fact that men tend to die before their wives. When the minister visits the bereaved widow, what comfort can he bring to her? She is apt to reflect upon her husband's lack of faith, and wonder about his final destiny. If she retains a smattering of traditional teaching, she may well believe that an active faith in Christ is the sole passport to heaven, and that her unbelieving and indifferent husband is consigned to eternal damnation. This is the 'dark and bitter question' which Rahner addresses – the apparent lack of Christian faith in a loved one with the consequent anxiety about the person's attainment of salvation.²

It is striking that so little attention has been paid in theological and churchly literature to the pastoral and personal consequences of the doctrine of hell and its torments. The subject is referred to by Alan Billings in *Dying and Grieving*, where he mentions an uncomfortable moment in his ministry as a young Anglican priest, when a very distressed, newly bereaved widow gripped his hand and asked, "Where is my husband now?" The question, as Billings comments leads on to others – Are the dead anywhere?

¹ Doyle, Robert C., *Eschatology and the Shape of Christian Belief*, (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1999), 6.

² Rahner, K., *Theological Investigations*, III, op.cit., 361-2.

Do the dead pass straight into the presence of God? Is there a period of purgation and preparation? Are the dead resurrected altogether at the end of the age?, and, if so, where are they in the meantime? Billings's own answer to that question is that when we consider the dead from the standpoint of this world, they are absent. The only way in which they 'exist' is in the mind of God. According to Billings, God holds "the 'blueprint' – the template of each individual" until they are present again at the final resurrection.³

This answer seems profoundly unsatisfactory, as it denies the deceased any opportunity in an intermediate state for conversion and spiritual development, and would offer scant support to the bereaved widow. Many would seek to comfort her here, by saying that she should realise that she is leaving the fate of her loved one in God's hands. Yet, this would offer small consolation as the traditional criteria for God's judgment would suggest that her loved one would be found wanting. Every evangelical sermon suggesting that a personal relationship with Christ in this life, is vital for salvation reinforces the anxiety in bereaved relatives that their loved ones are in danger.

That traditional views regarding the destiny of the unevangelised are still very much in vogue among church people recently came to light in a survey conducted by Eric Stoddart. He discovered that a clear majority of Scotland's clergy believe that there will be a Judgment Day at which we will be separated into two categories – 'the saved' or 'the lost'. A similar majority consider there to be no further opportunities for us, then, to switch from being lost to being saved. The result, in their opinion, will be that some of us will be eternally separated from God. Over a third of clergy believe that this separation will involve eternal mental anguish in hell; more than one fifth hold that this suffering will be an eternal physical torment. Most ministers in Scotland also believe post-mortem evangelisation is not a valid hope for people who are 'lost'. The prospect of loved ones being condemned to everlasting punishment in hell would be almost unbearable for their relatives to contemplate.⁴

³ Billings, A., *Dying and Grieving*, (London: SPCK., 2002), 34.

⁴ The alarming consequences of these views are well described by Stoddart as follows – "At stake is not something akin to the anxiety of the loved-ones of kidnap victims. In that scenario there is always the possibility that death will have intervened and the victim suffer no more. The torment believed to be in store for 'the lost' will have no end. This is awful enough for those people whom the hell-torment-believer will never know personally. The prospect of such suffering coming upon someone known

In her search for some extenuating factor, the bereaved widow might well point out that her husband had lived a morally exemplary life, and enquire of her pastor if this might enable God to forgive his lack of faith, and save him at least from the torment of everlasting punishment. Her minister, should he be personally convinced, if not of the truth of this thesis, at least of the possibility that its conclusion might be true, could offer strong words of comfort. He could perhaps discover that the husband had been an 'honest doubter', and that his agnostic views were sincerely held. He could not have joined the Church in these circumstances without being untrue to himself. Or, it could have been that he had suffered, in earlier life, a tragic misfortune, such as the early death of a child, which he could not reconcile with the existence of a loving God. Another possible scenario is that the husband had at one time, perhaps as an adolescent, attended a church in an undecided, seeking frame of mind, only to hear a very inadequate proclamation of the gospel, or to encounter, among a professedly Christian congregation, many whose lives and morals contradicted their Christian profession. In the mind of the adolescent seeker, doubts would thus be sown. The possible reasons for the husband's lack of faith could be diverse. The sceptical influences of colleagues or workmates, or his origins in a home where his parents had been unbelievers – any of these factors could have outweighed the church-going example and influence of his believing wife.

H.P. Owen alludes to the difficulties which many encounter in this life when the decision which may determine their ultimate destiny has to be taken before death. He points out that the concept of God in many people's minds is either non-existent or false. In addition, they do not have a clear idea of what it means to be morally good. Their ability to choose for, or against God, and indeed, to make moral choices, has been seriously weakened by heredity or their environment. Owen also notes that even Christians can find it difficult to make a clear-cut choice because the existence and providence of God are not always obvious in this life. Even for them the choice between good and evil is never an absolute choice. The fact that we are all sinners

intimately to them, about whom they care, is truly horrendous." – Stoddart, E., "Hell in Scotland: A Survey of Where the Nation's Clergy Think Some Might be Heading," in *Contact* 143 (2004), 22.

means that, apart from the saints, we ‘constantly hover’ between our love for God which brings eternal life, and our self-love which brings eternal death.⁵

In view of these difficulties, which would make the wife uncertain about her husband’s destiny, her pastor could extend to the wife the assurance that the God of love in whom she believed would have full knowledge of the causes responsible for her husband’s lack of faith, and, because he is a just God, would make allowances for him, and offer him a postmortem encounter with Christ.

The fact that the husband was being honest and true to himself would indicate that he was on the right path, without having arrived at an assured faith. Keith Ward draws attention to the fact in which inclusivists believe, that millions are saved by a God whom they do not recognise or know, because as long as they have honestly responded to the “claims and opportunities they discern in their lives”, they are heading in the right direction for eternal life. Ward is also in agreement with Owen’s point, noted above, that even for Christians, the final realisation of eternal life may be “very different from what they imagine.”⁶

There is a further point to be considered here. As has already been indicated in Chapter 4 above, much speculation about the after-life focuses upon the salvation of the individual. The emphasis of the Bible, however, is upon the social fellowship which is involved in salvation. If the believing wife were to die and enter heaven without her beloved earthly partner, her own bliss would be seriously impaired. We know from the doctrine of the Trinity that God is the very essence of loving community. God takes delight in his creatures as social beings themselves. If millions are excluded from the possibility of eternal life, then the social fellowship beyond death is incomplete and flawed. Many who could have shared the divine fellowship as his friends, cannot do so, because they have not been invited. This would sadden and spoil the fellowship, both for God and the deceased loved ones. The happiness of the saved must be incomplete while some they loved best are still on the other side and separated from visible companionship with them. They have to wait until their loved ones rejoin them “that they without us should not be made perfect.” (Heb.11: 40).

⁵ Owen, H.P., *Christian Theism*, (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1984), 137.

⁶ Ward, K., *God, Faith and the New Millennium*, op.cit., 191.

(b) Postmortem Ministries

There is a sense in which the joy of the saved cannot be complete until all men and women have submitted in love and obedience to God.⁷ While it is true that God's family will not be perfected until the final consummation, the joy of communion could be enhanced in the intermediate state by missionary enterprise. If we are, as the New Testament asserts, 'one body in Christ' (Rom.12:5), 'members one of another' (Eph.4:25), and called to 'bear one another's burdens' (Gal.6:2), it is inconceivable that committed Christians in the after-life will remain passive, leaving the evangelical initiative entirely to God. They will wish to share the faith and companionship with God, which has brought them such bliss, with those who, because of ignorance, immaturity or incapacity, have not received the same enlightenment, which comes only through accepting Christ. The idea that God will use human creatures as his messengers beyond death is to be found as far back as the theology of the Early Church Fathers⁸. It occurs also in the writings of some modern theologians, including Jerry Walls.⁹ The intriguing suggestion was made by a Victorian theologian, Herbert Luckock, that a call to postmortem ministry might explain "why God cuts short the earthly life of one whose life is of priceless value to Church or home."¹⁰ The possibility of postmortem ministry, then, could strengthen the hopes of a bereaved Christian widow that her unevangelised husband might ultimately be led to faith and salvation.¹¹

That 'final reconciliation to the love of God' mentioned by Ward, would be much more likely for the husband to make in the very different conditions of the after-life. The resplendent glory of the risen and exalted Christ would surely banish doubt from his mind. Furthermore, if indeed he had led a virtuous life on earth, his response would be

⁷ This is an emphasis strongly felt by Lesslie Newbigin in his *Signs Amid the Rubble*, op.cit., 24.

⁸ Trumbower quotes from Shepherd of Hermas, *Similitudes*, IX, 16.1-7 – "...these apostles and teachers, who preached the name of the Son of God, having fallen asleep in the power and faith of the Son of God, preached also to those who had fallen asleep before them, and themselves gave to them the seal of the preaching." Trumbower also records Clement of Alexandria's view in *Stromateis*, 6.6.38-53 that "the best among the apostles and teachers descended to convert and baptise dead Gentiles." – Trumbower, J.A., *Rescue for the Dead*, op.cit., 48, 99.

⁹ "Perhaps God may even continue to use human messengers on his behalf. Persons may learn about God from their fellow human beings, and respond in faith to what they learn." – Walls, J., op.cit., 90-100.

¹⁰ Luckock, H.M., *The Intermediate State Between Death and Judgment*, (London: Green & Co., 1894), 99.

that of a sincerely honest man. In such a case no prolonged period of painful purgation might be necessary before he would 'come to the light.' There is little doubt that unless a character is habituated in evil ways and the soul 'shrivelled' and lost as Lewis and Swinburne conceive possible, repentance and forgiveness could occur beyond death. As these are moral acts, they must be possible under a perfectly moral being.

All these considerations would afford the grieving widow strong consolation. No small part of that comfort would be the assurance that she would be reunited with him on her own death. It would not be the case that she would be destined for heaven, and he, for hell, but that both would enjoy reunion in the intermediate state.

Attention must now be given to more difficult applications of the principle. Can any hope be extended to the bereaved relatives of deceased, unrepentant sinners? The idea that a final decision, fixing one's ultimate destiny, must be taken in this life before death has already been rejected in this thesis, and the doctrine of the 'second chance' accepted. Is it, however, likely that the changed environment beyond death would be conducive to conversion? It is probable that earthly conditions, which make some people uncertain and perplexed about God in this life, will give way to a postmortem environment, where souls can experience a much clearer vision of God. While it is true that here on earth, we "see through a glass darkly" (1 Cor.13:12), it could be that in the intermediate state, there will be a fuller revelation of the Risen Christ, which will bring to the sinful soul a quickened conscience, and a desire to change.

Once again, the almost blinding revelation of Christ's divine goodness would surely melt and convert all but the hardest of hearts. It is, of course, entirely possible that an evil soul whose iniquity had become ingrained to the depth of a Hitler or a Stalin, would even then reject the overtures of Christ's love. As was concluded in the last chapter, God's love will never compromise the freedom of the human will, and, unless a universalist position is adopted, entrenched evil may continue to corrupt the inveterate sinner, making his purgatory a hell, until all traces of God's image are extinguished and a 'second death' occurs. In many, many cases, however, it would appear more likely that, after a prolonged and painful period of purgation, the sinner

¹¹ Ward, Keith, *God, Faith and the New Millennium*, (Oxford: One World, 1998), 191.

would surrender to the converting power of Christ's love, and begin to climb the lower rungs of the ascent to heaven. Bereaved relatives who might otherwise have resigned themselves to losing the 'black sheep' of the family to final damnation, could now be comforted. The possibility of final apostasy, in some cases, however, would of course restrict the assurance provided in most other cases by pastoral comfort.

(c) Prayers for the Dead and Reassurance for the Dying

A further source of comfort for the bereaved widow of an unevangelised husband could be provided by prayers for the dead. The Jews, in intertestamental times, appear to have used such prayers. The author of 2 Maccabees 12:43b-45, for example, believed, not only in intercession by the living for the dead, but also the reverse¹². Jewish service-books such as the *Kaddish* and *Haskarath Neshamoth* corroborate it. There is no direct mention of the practice in the teaching of Jesus, but he could well have approved of it. We do know, however, that the practice prevailed widely in the Early Church, which took it over from Jewish forbears. Scripture warrant for such prayers is, nevertheless, minimal. The most frequently quoted text is 2 Tim.1:18, in which prayer is offered up for Onesiphorus and 'his household'. It is not clear that Onesiphorus is actually dead, but R.H. Fuller points out the "prayer for his 'house', and the grateful memory of his services makes better sense if he has recently died."¹³ Stauffer also finds authority for the practice in Jesus's words which show that the intercessions of the Church "reach beyond this life and beyond this world."¹⁴ Intercessory baptism for the dead is also mentioned by Paul in 1 Cor.15:29. In the Primitive Christian Church, prayers for the dead appear to have been an essential part of Church life in both Western and Eastern Communion. In the West, such prayers were probably used, as far as public worship was concerned, only for the faithful departed, but, in the East, Christians had a duty to pray for those who had led a sinful life, and had been called away in the midst of their sin. Kallistos Ware notes that, while prayers for the departed in the Orthodox Church sometimes ask for deliverance from the terrors of the coming judgment, "more often, the note is one of sober and repentant hope."¹⁵

¹² See Trumbower, *op.cit.*, 29.

¹³ Fuller, R.H., "Prayer for the Departed," in *Theology* 53 (1950), 125.

¹⁴ Stauffer cites Matt. 16:19; 18:18 and John 20:23 in his *New Testament Theology*, *op.cit.*, 223.

¹⁵ Ware explains that "We ask that the departed may dwell in a place of light, green pasture and refreshment, when pain, sorrow and sighing have fled away." Ware goes on to inform us that "at the

In the medieval Church of Rome, masses, prayers and alms were thought to bring relief for the dead in purgatory. At the Reformation, to begin with, the Protestant Reformers also prayed for the dead, but eventually came to denounce the practice. They failed to see clear support for it in scripture, and so they rejected it, along with the doctrine of purgatory. In the Anglican Churches it had disappeared from the 1552 revision of *The Book of Common Prayer*.

In more modern times, the practice tended to be disapproved of by evangelicals, but was followed by those in the Anglican Churches with high Church leanings, until World War I, when, in Fuller's words, "it caught on in the Church of England." In the 20th century, it had some notable supporters – among them, William Temple and P.T. Forsyth¹⁶. More recently, the practice has been commended by Polkinghorne, although he is careful to advise that we rid our prayers for the dead "of some unfortunate and unedifying medieval distortions."¹⁷ The official position of the mainline churches in Britain today will be referred to, below, during consideration of "Funeral Rites."

Enough has been said to show that there is a long pedigree for the practice down through Christian history, but it is sad, that for some centuries after the Reformation, it was widely neglected. Given the theological presuppositions of this thesis, its reintroduction could be of some pastoral value to the churches. The theological views encouraging its revival are a widening of the scope of purgatory to include the unevangelised, and the offering of hope for a 'second chance.' If there is opportunity for spiritual development, and even conversion in the intermediate state, intercessory prayer could be as effective as it is in this earthly life, and no-one could logically object

'Vespers of Kneeling' on the evening of the Sunday of Pentecost, prayers are said even for those in hell." – Ware, K., "One Body in Christ: Death and the Communion of Saints" in *Sobornost* 3:2 (1981), 187, 189.

¹⁶ William Temple, in a sermon preached in Westminster Abbey on All Saints' Day, 1919, and already referred to above in Chapter 6, defended prayer for the dead. We pray for the dead "because we know that he (God) loves and cares for them, and we claim the privilege of sharing *our* love for them with God." – quoted by Welsby op.cit., 250.

Welsby also draws attention to the view of P.T. Forsyth who writes – "I venture to say, then, that the instinct and custom of praying for our dearest dead...should be encouraged and sanctified as a new bond for practical life between the seen and the unseen...Nothing in our Christian belief is against it, and there is a good deal for it." – Forsyth, P.T., *This Life and the Next*, (London: Independent Press Ltd., 1918), 36.

to the practice. Archbishop William Ramsay has written about the theory of intercession, and how “the compassion of God...seems to wait upon the co-operation of human wills,” and he describes our prayers as “channels of God’s compassion.”¹⁸ While Ramsay is speaking about intercession for those here on earth, this theory could also apply to prayers for the departed. Loving relatives of an unevangelised, deceased person could express their continuing sympathy and concern along with their mourning grief, by taking their prayers into the stream of that divine love which is just as active after death as before death. Such prayers would be addressed to God through Christ, who is at God’s right hand, and “always lives to make intercession.” (Heb. 7: 25). The view put forward here is especially compatible with opentheism, for, as was noted above in Chapter 5, opentheists believe that God interacts in dialogue with his creatures, and can even change his mind in response to intercession. Belief in “the communion of saints” can undoubtedly be of comfort to bereaved Christians, because they can still have prayerful relationships with deceased loved ones, who were believers through the Risen Christ. It has also been suggested that the departed can help surviving relatives here on earth by their intercession.¹⁹ Where this thesis breaks new ground is in contending that intercession can benefit, the unevangelised dead.

The opportunity for postmortem conversion could have yet another beneficial effect upon pastoral ministry. As well as offering comfort to the bereaved, it could also offer reassurance to the dying, particularly to those of the unevangelised who hold agnostic views. Although they might not admit it openly, many probably entertain anxious fears about death, and what may lie beyond. Uncertainty about one’s postmortem destiny probably means, if not anxiety and distress, at least a hopeless resignation at the prospect that death ends all. Unless earthly life has been shadowed by suffering and pain, when death would come as a welcome release, how could anyone who had enjoyed life, look forward to its being snuffed out into nothingness at the last? Death, to the agnostic, could also spell a final farewell to loved ones lost, not ‘for a while’, but forever.

¹⁷ Polkinghorne’s concern expresses itself thus – “We are not involved in an instrumental manipulation on their behalf, as an unreformed notion of ‘masses for the dead’ seemed to suggest.” – Polkinghorne, J., *The God of Hope and the End of the World*, (London: SPCK., 2002), 110.

¹⁸ Ramsay, W., *Be Still and Know*, (London: Collins, 1982), 74.

¹⁹ For example, by Leslie Weatherhead – “We believe that there is a gracious and kindly ministry, too long neglected, to be rendered by prayers for the dead, and perhaps a mutual helpfulness – who knows? – by their prayers for us.” – Weatherhead, L.D., *After Death*, (London: Epworth Press, 1923), 122.

Kallistos Ware calls upon Christians to “oppose the death-denying culture around us.”²⁰ There is a tendency in modern Western society to ignore death, to keep it out of sight, and this means that life becomes ‘mean and mediocre.’ Ware emphasises the importance in Orthodox Churches of preparation for death, whereas in Roman Catholic and Anglican spirituality, mentioning the imminence of death has become unfashionable. Pastoral care, based upon the conclusions of this thesis, would seek to counter-act this escapist avoidance of the subject of death. It would hold out to the doubting agnostic, a future full of hope beyond death. This hope would be founded upon faith in a future encounter with Christ, bringing a revelation of God’s loving-kindness, which the dying person had never experienced upon earth. While the vision of Christ would cause painful pangs of conscience, the judgment he would bring upon himself would gradually recede before the mercy and forgiveness of God. The soul would enjoy peace, joy and the expectation of reunion with loved ones – a vista, preferable by far, to the anxiety-ridden, joyless prospect of extinction which faces most agnostics and atheists. Reassurance for those dying unevangelised, allied to comfort for the loved ones about to be bereaved, would greatly enhance pastoral ministry in these circumstances.

The conclusion of this thesis, if true, means that the prospect of postmortem life in an intermediate state applies to every human being, both to the evangelised and to the unevangelised. As Paul reminds us – “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). A process of sanctification continues beyond death, even for those who have been justified by faith, through the continuing operation of the Holy Spirit upon human hearts. Some, of course, will be much further along the road of their spiritual pilgrimage towards the beatific vision in heaven, than others. This conclusion is not presented as a dogmatic article, but rather as a reasonable hope based upon the nature of God as a God of love and justice.

²⁰ Ware, K. *op.cit.*, 179-80.

(d) Funeral Liturgies

Paul Sheppy, in his Ph.D thesis, *Liturgy and Death*,²¹ examines the pastoral and theological issues relating to funerals, with special reference to selected funeral rites. He draws attention to the growing need for alternative funeral provision, which is now required by the growth of pluralism, agnosticism and non-belief. There are no longer beliefs and practices which are socially agreed, and many Christian funerals are seen as meaningless. Sheppy's point is that "Theological presuppositions of rites may not correspond with the beliefs and understandings of those who mourn."²² The normal position seems to be that "Christian funeral rites frequently presume the Christian faith, not only of the deceased, but also of the mourners."²³

Some of the theological positions which Sheppy advocates are in line with this thesis—for example, his use of our Lord's descent to the dead which he believes has "cosmic implications" and implies "that in Jesus's death there was a progress to God which was inclusive of all the dead." Sheppy, however, draws a universalist conclusion, and, instead, it would seem preferable to say that Jesus's descent holds out the *offer* of progress to God for everyone.

The application of Sheppy's theological presuppositions to funeral rites ought to be examined. He believes that the question – "What happens when I die?" ought to be addressed in the funeral because "it is central to the rites of death,"²⁴ and that "the funeral must rehearse the journey which the living and the dead must travel."²⁵ Sheppy examines the various funeral rites in use in mainline Churches up until his thesis was completed in 1994; he finds them all inadequate, although the New Zealand Prayer Book of 1989, in its introductory notes, honestly recognises the difficulties posed by those who do not profess full Christian beliefs. It advocates our dependence upon God

²¹ Sheppy, P.P.J., *Liturgy and Death*, unpublished Ph.D., thesis. (University of Leeds, 1994).

²² *ibid.*, 5.

²³ *ibid.*, 7.

²⁴ *ibid.*, 118.

²⁵ *ibid.*, 97.

in life, and in death, and emphasises that there is no separation for anyone from God's love.²⁶

A perusal of the funeral rites published by mainline denominations in Great Britain since 1994, reveals that little has changed. The Funeral Service, for example, prepared in 2001, by the Joint Liturgical Group for use in Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches in England,²⁷ emphasises rest and peace for the deceased, but the closest it comes to addressing the needs of the unevangelised and their mourners is contained in one of the optional prayers, recommended for use "Where Faith is Difficult." The prayer reads –

We scarcely know the words to speak,
We scarcely know if they are heard.
When all seems dark, we look for light
When all is pain, we long for help.
In the silence we wait

Silence

We grieve for N, and mourn our loss.
Accept all that was good in *her*.
Forgive all that was wrong in *her*, and in us.
For past joy we give thanks,
In present sorrow we seek courage,
In the silence, we wait.

Silence.²⁸

Even the prayer for "The Death of a Child" omits any kind of hope or petition for the child's ongoing maturation in the life to come.

Also published in the same book is "The Funeral Service from 'Common Worship'" – containing services and prayers for the Church of England. In these prayers, the assumption is made that eternal life is promised to those who believe, and the prayers

²⁶ The "Prayer for General Use" in the New Zealand Prayer Book, although it does not specifically refer to the unevangelised, could be understood to include them. It reads – "Father of all, we pray to you for those we love, but see no longer. We thank you for the peace and light you bestow upon them; in your loving wisdom and almighty power, continue to work in them the good purpose of your perfect will, through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen." – *A New Zealand Prayer Book*, (Auckland: Collins, 1989), 858.

²⁷ *Funeral Services of the Christian Churches in England*, (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2nd new ed., 2001).

²⁸ *ibid.*, 14-5.

ask God “to bring all who rest in Christ into the fullness of your kingdom.”²⁹ There is no mention at all in any of the prayers of the destiny of the agnostic or the unevangelised.

Study of earlier Roman Catholic funeral rites reveals, however, that their priests are advised to be aware that there could be persons present at funerals, “who seldom or never participate in the eucharist, or who seem to have lost their faith.”³⁰ A more recent Roman Catholic “Order of Christian Funerals” actually contains a prayer for a deceased non-Christian married to a Catholic.³¹

The latest compilation of prayers for use at funeral services in the Church of Scotland,³² appears also to assume that the deceased are believing Christians. The nearest prayer which could be used appropriately at the funeral of an unevangelised person reads –

Now that you have called *her* to yourself
help us to learn to be content
to release *her* to you,
her Father and our Father.

We trust in your unending mercy
And commend *her* to your care.
Rest eternal grant unto *her*, O Lord,
And let light perpetual shine upon *her*.³³

The revision of funeral rites to accommodate prayers for the unevangelised, for which Sheppy pleaded in 1994, has not yet taken place. Ministers and vicars are regularly asked to conduct funerals for deceased agnostics, and require to compose prayers of their own without guidance from the published service books of their denominations. It is because the eternal destiny of those deceased is unclear, that traditional

²⁹ *ibid.*, 32.

³⁰ *Rite of Funerals Revised by Decree of Second Vatican Council...Approved for use in Scotland*, (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1972), 11.

³¹ The prayer reads – “Almighty and faithful Creator, all things are of your making, all people are shaped in your image. We now entrust the soul of N to your goodness. In your infinite wisdom and power, work in him/her your merciful purpose, known to you alone from the beginning of time. Console the hearts of those who love him/her in the hope that all who trust in you will find peace and rest in your kingdom.” – *Order of Christian Funerals*, (Approved for use in the Roman Catholic Dioceses of England, Wales and Scotland), (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1991), 419.

³² *Book of Common Order of the Church of Scotland*, (Edinburgh: St Andrew Press, 1994).

³³ *ibid.*, 266.

theological presuppositions about the 'double outcome' of heaven or hell cannot be expected to undergird appropriate prayers. It is interesting to learn that when Cicely Saunders, the founder of St Christopher's Hospice fell in love first with an atheist and then two Catholics, her clear-cut evangelicalism softened in reaction to their deaths.³⁴ There ought to be, in officially sanctioned funeral rites, optional or alternative prayers for deceased persons who are not Christian believers when they die.³⁵ Completely secular funerals would not be welcomed by surviving relatives who do have faith. They would prefer a Christian service, but one which does not unthinkingly assume that their deceased loved one is entering heaven straightaway, despite her lack of Christian belief.

According to the presuppositions of this thesis, more needs to be included in the prayer than a petition to God to grant the dead person 'rest and peace.' Reference should clearly be made to the all-encompassing efficacy of Christ's death and resurrection. In many cases a prayer referring to sin and forgiveness, mentioning the significance of Christ's Cross would be appropriate. As well as releasing the deceased to 'God's care and keeping', there should be an expression of hope which would be a particular comfort to mourners. The most obvious shortcoming in existing liturgies is the complete absence of faith in postmortem growth and spiritual development., far less of conversion. If this thesis corresponds to the truth, the continuing existence of the unevangelised in an intermediate state ought to be one of the prominent facts influencing the content of the prayers. There would still appear to be a long-established prejudice in many Protestant churches against prayers for the dead, which are associated in many minds with the Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory. Liturgical Commissions in the churches are unlikely to supply appropriate prayers until their Panels on Doctrine are prepared to revise traditional theological positions regarding the destiny of the unevangelised.

³⁴ Mentioned in Walter, T., *Funerals and How to Improve Them*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1990), 96.

The conclusion of this thesis could also make an important contribution to theodicy. The traditional theology which promotes belief in a 'double outcome', when based on Calvinist predestination, raises questions about God's nature. The view that some are elected to salvation, and others to damnation, irrespective of their deserts, discourages belief in a God of love and justice. Yet this opinion is disputed by theologians of conservative views. John Gerstner, for example, does not accept that it is unjust of God to condemn someone who has had no opportunity to be saved. He believes that such persons are damned because they are sinners, and not because they had an opportunity to be saved, and did not accept it. "What is unfair," he asks, "in God's damning sinners?"³⁶

The answer to Gerstner's question is that it is unjust of God to condemn sinners without giving them an opportunity for repentance. Gerstner goes on to observe that "Grace by definition is undeserved," and so he asks – "How can it be said that God owes it to anyone?" The answer is that he offers it to everyone, not because they deserve it, but solely by reason of his love.

The traditional view of hell, pictured as a kind of 'torture chamber' would also engender scepticism about God and his nature. The traditional beliefs must act as powerful disincentives to faith, and contribute to modern secularism.

Also, the problem of unmerited suffering poses critical questions for faith, and may indeed be the single most important reason for atheism and agnosticism. There are so many cases of what Moltmann calls 'the spoiled life.' He means us to think of those who die without their characters and personalities coming to full maturity.³⁷ If God is a God who affords postmortem opportunity for the flowering of character, then one of

³⁵ A plea for liturgical revision along these lines was made by Perham, M. *Communion of Saints*, (London: SPCK., 1980), 108-14.

³⁶ Gerstner, J.H., "The Fate of the Heathen" in *Dictionary of Theology*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1961), 263.

³⁷ "Think of the life of those who were not permitted to live, and were unable to live; the beloved child dying at birth; the little boy run over by a car when he was four; the disabled brother who never lived consciously, and never knew his parents; the friend torn to pieces by a bomb at your side when he was sixteen; the throngs of children who die prematurely of hunger in Africa; the countless number of the raped and murdered and killed." – Moltmann, J. *The Coming of God*, op.cit., 116.

the strongest arguments against his existence and loving nature, crumbles. Why should the dice of human happiness and privilege be so heavily loaded against some, and not against others? There must surely be, beyond death, some redress of such apparent injustice, if belief in a God of love is to be preserved.

The nature of God as portrayed in this thesis, is of One who relates – as opentheism suggests – to his human creatures, more like a loving marriage partner or parent, than as an autocratic king. Such an understanding of God would, it seems likely, prove attractive to seeking souls. A God who honours human freedom, and limits his sovereignty to allow for their free response, would encourage responsible human co-operation in the fulfilment of his divine purposes.

The necessity for human freedom after death is stressed by Walls in response to the idea that such freedom might be infringed by God's grace. It is sometimes suggested that, after death, God's reality may be so evident, that it would inhibit a free response to him. His majesty and power might be so dominant, that persons would submit out of fear. But Walls observes that if people were to react in this way, it would not be out of faith and love. His point is that God "would reveal himself only to such an extent as would enable a free response."³⁸

Such a God inspires moral endeavour in a way that a manipulative God would never do. Life, both before and after death, then becomes much more meaningful than it would be if God's creatures were simply pawns moved around willy-nilly by an almighty chess-player.

The pastoral comfort outlined above, and the contribution made to theodicy, combine to provide the Church with a powerful aid to mission. The main contention of this thesis, however, has been regarded by some as undermining the urgency of mission. This danger, as was noted already, is alluded to by John Baillie. Although there is a danger of this, it need not threaten the Church's commission to evangelise. The idea that the gospel should be preached in order to save souls from hell-fire, although at one time widely accepted, is now regarded as unworthy. It encourages people to become

³⁸ Walls, J.L., *op.cit.*, 100.

Christians to save themselves from damnation – a prudential, self-serving motive for accepting Christ as Saviour. Furthermore, the fulfilling nature of following Christ in this life, in obedience to his commission, would in itself be sufficient justification and a far worthier imperative to mission than ‘pie in the sky when you die’.

Pinnock also rejects the charge that universal access to salvation would imperil the motivation for mission. He rejects the argument that the main motivation for mission is to save non-Christians from hopelessness, before the prospect of eternity, or to deliver them from the wrath to come. Christian missions have a much broader purpose, including, not only the foundation of church communities, but also to forward God’s strategy – “to change life’s atmosphere, to infect people with hope, love and responsibility for the world.”³⁹

In addition, it would surely be true that the rejection of the gospel would lead to a painful, purgatorial healing process in the intermediate state, and, while avoidance of this should never be the principal reason for accepting Christ, it would have a part to play in a decision affecting one’s destiny. The process through which self-regard is purged, and we come to terms with ourselves, while it can be speeded up by the degree to which we co-operate with grace, can also be slowed down by our own reluctance, and this means that proclamation of the gospel remains an urgent necessity.

In commending this thesis as an aid to mission, it is contended that a philosophy of life which directs people to a way of life here and now, leading to an enhanced and fully satisfying existence hereafter, for which this life is a preparation, is far more meaningful and attractive than the traditional theology of the ‘double outcome’, or than one which envisages life petering out in final extinction.

The concept of an amended version of purgatory advanced in this thesis would lend comfort to another group of people, namely the victims of crime. Those who suffer as a result of wrongdoing by others, do not always see justice done in this life. A murderer, for example, may never be apprehended, or, there is a miscarriage of justice. Also, there are plenty of examples of people perpetrating cruel injustices upon their fellow-

³⁹ Pinnock, C.H., *A Wideness in God’s Mercy*, op.cit., 176-8.

men and women, and never receiving their just deserts this side of death. Conversely, multitudes of ordinary people live decent, hard-working lives without receiving the accolade of recognition or appreciation from their fellows.

One of the attractions of Moltmann's eschatology is that he envisages the restoration of all things, when, at the Judgment, God in his righteousness, "creates justice and puts things to rights."⁴⁰

While Moltmann's universalist conclusion is not acceptable, it seems probable that after death, God will seek, without overriding human freedom, to 'put things to rights'. He will seek to redress the injustices which some of his creatures have suffered on earth, and he will aim, through reformatory punishment, to heal and transform the wrongdoers whose earthly crimes went undetected and unpunished. One strongly recurring theme in many obituaries is the idea that in the after-life God will correct the unfairnesses which are such a feature of life in this world.

Put your arm around her, Lord,
Treasure her with care,
Make up for all she suffered
And all that seemed unfair.⁴¹

(f) Relations with Other Faiths

A further advantage which would accrue from the practical implementation of this thesis's conclusion would be an improvement in relations between the Christian Church and people of other faiths. According to mainline traditional theology, adherents of other religions cannot be saved. Conversion to Christ, it maintains, in this life, is necessary for salvation. This thesis, too, supports the finality of Christ as the sole source of salvation, but also maintains that conversion does not require to take place before death. As already indicated in Chapter 4, the 'anonymous Christian' principle of Rahner, the inclusivism of the open-theists, and the pluralism of, for example, Hick, are rejected. Instead, it is contended here that followers of the great world religions, such as Islam, Judaism, Hinduism and Buddhism, will have a postmortem opportunity to

⁴⁰ Moltmann, *op.cit.*, 243.

⁴¹ Quoted in Hoggart, Richard, *The Uses of Literacy*, (London: Penguin, 1957).

encounter Christ. Some Christian theologians, including, in particular, some Lutherans, believe that other religions can be a preparation for hearing the Gospel of Christ, and that, at the end of history, there will be a revelation of Christ. Carl Braaten holds to the finality of Christ, and believes that, what God is doing in other religions can only be known in the light of Christ which comes from the gospel.⁴²

The beauty of Braaten's position is that, while believing that "outside of Christ there is no salvation", he attributes value to other faiths. It might be said that they can set their adherents on the right road, and at the final consummation they will find in Christ the fulfilment of their own faiths.⁴³

The idea of convergence among the world religions in an intermediate state, as they apprehend the truth more clearly will also mean that we as Christians may then come to a clearer understanding of the importance of other worldviews.⁴⁴

The Lutheran view, expressed by Braaten, that non-Christian religions can act as a preparation for the Gospel is also held by theologians of other branches of the Church.⁴⁵ Hans Küng, for example, believes that Christ should be proclaimed as 'normative' for all peoples. He describes Christianity as the necessary 'critical catalyst' for all other faiths. Without Christ's revelation, the religions cannot really understand and appropriate the salvation at work within them. Once again, as Braaten also believes, for full understanding of the truth, the preaching of the Christian Gospel is

⁴² Braaten, C.E., "Lutheran Theology and Religious Pluralism" in *Lutheran World Federation*, (1988), 113.

⁴³ Braaten's conclusion is as follows – "The model we are proposing... pictures Jesus Christ as the revelation of the eschatological fulfilment of the religions. The gospel of Jesus Christ does not destroy but fulfils the religions. The universality of Christ is something that is being worked out through the interaction of the religions and will be established for all eyes to see only at the end of history. Neither Christianity nor the plurality of religions has arrived at the endpoint of history where Christ will be revealed as the universal future and fulfilment of the totality of nature, history, culture and religion." – *ibid.*, 125.

⁴⁴ In Keith Ward's words – "...the truth of the Christian account entails that beyond this earthly life, there will be opportunities to learn and develop and come to know God more clearly. This will be true of Christians as well as of others, so that we may be sure that our particular views of Christian truth may change considerably as we come face to face with truth. At that point we may understand more fully what the importance is of the existence of so many different worldviews, and to what extent there can be a convergence, towards a presently hidden truth between them." – Ward, *op.cit.*, 171.

⁴⁵ See, for example, Carl Braaten- "Just as the church fathers could say that Greek philosophy was a preamble to the gospel analogous to the function of Jewish law, so also the religions may play a similar role in the history of humanity. Every religion has its prophets, something like John the Baptist, preparing the way for the coming of Christ." -Braaten, Carl E., "Lutheran Theology and Religious Pluralism" in *Lutheran World Federation* 23-24 (1988), 112.

necessary.⁴⁶ K  ng uses a much better phrase than Rahner’s ‘anonymous Christians’. He describes adherents of other faith as *potential* Christians. To obtain salvation, however, the potential must be realised, and that means in by far the majority of cases, in postmortem encounters.

A full survey of views across the various denominations of the Church is contained in Paul F. Knitter’s *No Other Name*.⁴⁷ Anglican beliefs held by M.A.C. Warren, Kenneth Cragg and John V. Taylor, describe Christ as ‘the hidden Christ’ or ‘the unknown Christ’ who saves even when he is unrecognised as the Saviour. In Eastern Orthodoxy also, there is the belief that Christ is active in all the religions through the activity of the Spirit.⁴⁸ Roman Catholic theologians tend to say that both revelation *and* salvation can be found beyond the borders of Christianity. Christ is, in Knitter’s words:

the final cause of salvation, which cause clearly expresses and incarnates a divine presence given and operative in all religions.⁴⁹

The documents of the Second Vatican Council, while affirming the dignity and worth of other religious traditions, and even atheism, see “whatever goodness or truth is found among them...as a preparation for the gospel.”⁵⁰ Grace Jantzen comments critically on this position, because she does not regard it as obvious that the enlightenment which Christianity gives is superior to that of other religions, nor does she accept that Christianity should be regarded as their fulfilment. A Muslim or Buddhist, in her eyes, does not adhere to his religion, “as a preparation for some further religion which he has not yet discovered.”⁵¹

The mainline Protestant model is much more exclusive. While affirming a universal revelation, it holds that this can never lead to salvation.^{52,53}

⁴⁶ K  ng, Hans, *On Being a Christian*, op.cit., 113, 447.

⁴⁷ Knitter, Paul F., *No Other Name*, (London: SCM Press, 1985), 133-141.

⁴⁸ Knitter quotes Georges Khodr, metropolitan of Mt. Lebanon in Lebanon – “the economy of Christ cannot be reduced to its historical manifestation.” – “The Economy of the Holy Spirit” in Samantha, S.J. (ed.), *Living Faiths and the Ecumenical Movement*, (Geneva: WCC., 1971), 131-142.

⁴⁹ Knitter, P.F., op.cit., 140-141.

⁵⁰ Abbott, Walter M., (ed.), *The Documents of Vatican II*, op.cit., 35.

⁵¹ Jantzen, G., “Human Diversity and Salvation in Christ” in *Religious Studies*, 20 (1984) 582/4.

⁵² Knitter, P.F., op.cit., 114, 116.

⁵³ Distinctive among Protestant viewpoints is that of Barth – “According to this, the way in which God, acting in Christ, saves non-Christians is thoroughly ‘objective’. Their status in the eyes of God has been transformed quite apart from any ‘subjective’ changes in themselves. They have become ‘potential

After having surveyed this wide spectrum of differing views, it is time to state where this thesis stands on the possibility of salvation for non-Christians. While rejecting the full inclusivist position, it is, however, maintained that the Spirit of Christ can be active among adherents of other faiths.⁵⁴ As Swinburne observes, it is important that people are honest in their search after truth. But, if they fail to discover the truth (i.e. the Christian faith), in this life, it should not prevent them from reaching heaven.⁵⁵

It is arguable, therefore, that honest seekers after truth in any religion, can unwittingly be guided by the Spirit of Christ, and are on the path to salvation. They are 'potential Christians' and their potential salvation may be realised in an intermediate state, and, where necessary, with greater or less purgatorial accompaniments. J.A. Dinoia prefers to speak of future or 'prospective' affiliation of non-Christians with the Christian community rather than their present but 'hidden' membership in it. This would indeed appear to be less patronising towards other faiths, and would recognise the value of their own particular doctrines. They would not then be described as 'anonymous' or 'implicit' Christians, but, if they were leading lives of morally upright and altruistic conduct, they would ultimately share in the divinely willed consummation which Jesus Christ makes possible.⁵⁶ This point of view should be endorsed.

An interesting, but very radical suggestion has recently been made by Mark Heim who suggests that the faithful followers of all the major religions, when they die, go to their own particular paradise. These are not to be considered as blessed as the Christian

Christians'. Explicit faith makes only a noetic difference, informing non-Christians of what they already are. There are no signs of it in experiences of non-Christians." – Lindbeck, G. "Unbelievers and the *Sola Christ* in *The Church in a Postliberal Age*, op.cit., 79.

⁵⁴ This is the view held, for example, by Sir Norman Anderson, who asks – "What of mature persons who have sinned consciously but have never heard (and are therefore in no position to accept with explicit faith), the gospel of God's matchless love for the whole world? May it not be that 'God our Saviour, who wants all men to be saved' (1 Tim. 2:4), and does want 'anyone to perish' (2 Pet. 3:9) quickens in some men by his Spirit a consciousness of sin and need, and enables them, in the twilight, to cast themselves on his mercy? If so, then they too, would be saved by the grace of God in Christ alone." – Anderson, Sir Norman, *Christianity and World Religions*, (Leicester: IVP., 1984), 168.

⁵⁵ Swinburne, R., "A Theodicy of Heaven and Hell," in Freddoso A., (ed.), *The Existence and Nature of God*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 39.

⁵⁶ Dinoia, J.P., "Implicit Faith, General Revelation and the State of Non-Christians," in *The Thomist V* 47 (1983), 235.

heaven, but are given by God as ‘intermediate ends’, with the possibility of further progress to ‘the celestial city.’⁵⁷

This suggestion, and the pluralism it entails, is unlikely. Heim probably would agree that it would be more in keeping with the divine purpose that the ultimate consummation brings adherents of all the world religions together into one reconciled fellowship, in a common allegiance to the Christ who said, “But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.” (John 12:32). But the all-inclusive social nature of the fellowship in the intermediate state is important. Too often salvation is pictured in individualist terms, instead of in terms of fellowship.⁵⁸

No doubt a theological position which maintains the finality of Christ as this thesis does would be less acceptable to non-Christian believers than a pluralist one. Yet it seems probable that Küng’s description of the world religions as the ‘ordinary’, the common way to salvation, whereas Christianity makes up the ‘extraordinary’, the special way,⁵⁹ would be more congenial to them than the traditionalist view which would claim that they are completely barred from salvation.

The conclusion of Chapter 4 was that Lesslie Newbigin’s reverent agnosticism about the fate of the individual non-Christian does not go far enough, but his overall position on the question of salvation in the world religions is admirable, and should be a basis for dialogue between the Church and other faiths. He says:

⁵⁷Heim’s suggestion is as follows – “...perhaps faithful Christians go to heaven, but faithful Muslims find themselves in an Islamic paradise, faithful Vaishnava Hindus dwell in company with Krishna, devoted Buddhists enjoy Nirvana, North Americans go to a happy hunting or fishing ground, and so on. These alternative religious ends are not, from the Christian point of view, nearly as blessed as the Christian beatitude of fellowship with the Triune God and Christ’s Church in the New Jerusalem. But they are granted by God as intermediate ends, which people have chosen and properly pursued, and from which, some, perhaps, will yet move onward to the celestial city.” – Heim, S.M., *The Depths of the Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2001), quoted by Stackhouse, J.G. (ed.), *No Other Gods Before Me*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2001), 199.

⁵⁸This is one of the emphases in Lesslie Newbigin’s eschatology. He observes that: “The only fruition for the individual soul is in fellowship and a perfect fellowship implies perfect souls who form it...It will be seen that all the labours of faithful souls to create true human fellowship have not been lost, but taken up and consummated in the perfection of God’s Kingdom.” (Newbigin, L., *Signs Amid the Rubble*, op.cit., 49-50.

⁵⁹Küng, H., “The World Religions in God’s Plan of Salvation” in *Christian Revelation and the World Religions*, 25-66, quoted by Knitter, P.F., op.cit., 127.

The Church, as it is *in via*, does not face the world as the exclusive possessor of salvation, nor as the fullness of what others have in part, the answer to the questions they ask, or the open revelation of what they are anonymously. The Church faces the world, rather, as *arrabon*, of that salvation – as sign, firstfruit, token, witness of that salvation which God purposes for the whole.⁶⁰

(g) Conclusion

The conclusion of this thesis is that there is scripture warrant for the hope of salvation for the unevangelised. This confidence does not rest so much on individual texts as on deduction from the love and justice of God in Christ revealed in the pages of the Bible. The nature of God, as opentheism pictures him, namely as a God whose sovereignty and omniscience is self-limited in order to allow his creatures freedom and responsibility to respond to his grace, opens up the prospect of conversion, not just in this life, but also beyond death. Opentheism is to be followed in believing in the finality of Christ as the sole source of salvation. The inclusivist position of opentheists, however, should be rejected on the grounds that general revelation is an insufficient basis for salvation. Belief in an intermediate state is, therefore, central to the thesis, an intermediate state during which opportunity would be given to the unevangelised to respond to divine initiative through encounter with Christ. The postmortem experience would be similar to purgatory – shorn of the features which have proved unacceptable to Reformed doctrine, and not being confined to those who had already found faith in this life, and allowing, in some cases, a ‘second’ or even more chances of conversion. Belief in ‘hopeful universalism’ is preferred to dogmatic universalism. The practical applications of this theological position could be of real value to the life of the Church – and this, in three main ways. The possibility of postmortem conversion could be a powerful source of comfort to bereaved relatives of dead loved ones who were unevangelised. Also, the picture of God’s nature, as portrayed in this thesis, could make an important contribution to the mission of the Church, through theodicy, by removing one of the principal sources of atheistical and agnostic views. Finally, a hopeful outlook for the salvation of non-Christian adherents of other religions could advance dialogue between the Church and other faiths, leading to future theological and churchly convergence.

⁶⁰ Newbigin, L., *The Open Secret*, (London: SPCK., 1978), 202-3.

As, however, there is mystery and uncertainty surrounding future destiny – particularly for the unevangelised – the conclusions of this thesis, involving, as they do, belief in an intermediate state, postmortem ‘second chances’ and conversion, cannot be accorded dogmatic status. It is presented, rather, as a theologically sound possibility, based on the firm foundation of God’s infinite love and mercy, and, hopefully, as a reasonable approximation to what may ultimately be true of final destiny.

(h) Areas for Further Research

This thesis has uncovered a number of areas which require further research. The concept of spiritual development in an intermediate state raises questions about whether temporal categories apply beyond death. If they do *not* apply, as Rahner, for example, maintains, how can there be growth in character and personality, as growth seems to imply past, present and future, or is there a special kind of postmortem time, which seems to be Moltmann’s position?

A second area calling for further study is an enquiry into how the non-Christian religions regard the future destiny of unbelievers. Is there something to be gleaned, for example, as Ward believes, from the Vaishnava interpretation of rebirth in Buddhism,⁶¹ or, from the Muslim concept of the intermediate state – the *barzakh*?⁶² Fredericks prefers what he calls “comparative theology” to the more traditional “theology of religions.” By “comparative theology”, he means exploring “the truths of Christianity in dialogue with the teachings and traditions of other religious believers.”⁶³ In this way, Christians can come to understand their own beliefs in a novel and enriching way. Fresh light could therefore be shed from other religions on the final destiny of the unevangelised.

A third area, requiring sustained discussion is whether in the intermediate state, continuing existence would be disembodied, as traditional exegesis of some scriptural

⁶¹ Ward, K., *Religion and Human Nature*, op.cit., 62.

⁶² *ibid.*, 262.

⁶³ Fredericks, op.cit., 162.

texts might imply. Or, would the resurrected 'spiritual bodies' of Paul's theology in 1 Corinthians be created at death rather than at the parousia? An investigation into this subject would require to consider ideas such as H.H.Price's 'ideoplastic' image-world. mentioned in his book, *Essays in the Philosophy of Religion*.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Price, H.H., *Essays in the Philosophy of Religion*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 115.

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